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Marie Gérin-Lajoie's Hidden Crucifixes: Social Catholicism, Feminism and Québec Modernity 1910-1930

by

Danyèle Lacombe

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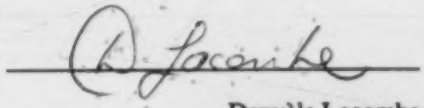

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ABSTRACT

Québec's revisionist historiography contends that turn-of-the-century Québec was characterized by conflicting ideological strands as it dealt with the challenges of modernity. This thesis supports these claims by arguing that Marie Gérin-Lajoie's (1890-1971) struggle with modernity stemmed from the already modern and secularizing character of Quebec society. She devoted her life to the betterment of women and, combining science with Social Catholicism, built the *Institut Notre-Dame du Bon-Conseil* (1923), to train them in social work and contribute to the restoration of a Christian social order. Leading to the last chapter on the *Institut*, the thesis examines Gérin-Lajoie's readings, her study trips to France and New York as recorded in her correspondence, and her work as editor of a women's newsletter. It begins by situating Gérin-Lajoie and Social Catholicism in the socio-political contexts of Québec and France, and positions her in relation to feminism -- her era's and ours.

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Introduction

Progress must not be seen
as a rupture with the past;
but rather, as its natural fulfillment.[1]

In a career dedicated to social reform and to the construction of a Catholic social order, Marie Gérin-Lajoie took on the contradictions of modernity. Born in 1890 into a prestigious French-Canadian bourgeois family,[2] she devoted her life to developing an institutional structure dedicated to training women in the new and emerging field of social work. She traveled to the United States to study the latest methods in this field, and spent time in Europe to explore the principles of the Social Catholic movement, another response to the social problems resulting from industrialization and rapid urbanization. In other words, she both explored the science of social work (technical methods of analysis, sociological theories), and searched for a spiritual philosophy behind such a vocation, because, in an increasingly secular world, her goal was to secure the directing role of spirituality in the public realm. She would eventually come to the conclusion that the most appropriate structure to bring these two elements together, under the guidance of religion, was that of a flexible and open religious congregation, thus proposing a new model for

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[1] The archival sources that were consulted in doing this research are located at the *Institut Notre-Dame du Bon-Conseil* in Montreal. Henceforth, the acronym AINDBC will be used when referring to these archives. AINDBC, P1/C,5, Marie Gérin-Lajoie, "Cours préparatoire à l'action sociale, Troisième partie: La doctrine Catholique et les oeuvres," (Montréal 1919), 89:"Le progrès ne doit pas être considéré comme une rupture avec le passé; c'en est l'épanouissement normal.

[2] Her grandfather, Antoine Gérin-Lajoie, was a well-known literary author in French Canada, and one of his sons, Léon, is considered the first French Canadian sociologist who studied in France with Frédéric LePlay. His other son, Henri, was Marie Gérin-Lajoie's father. He practised law and later became president of the head office of the *Banque provinciale du Canada*. Her mother, Marie Lacoste Gérin-Lajoie, founded with an anglophone colleague, the Provincial Suffrage Committee. In her fight for women's right to vote in Québec, she lobbied the clergy for years, met Premier Alexandre Tashereau and traveled to Rome to attend the conference of the *Union internationale des Ligues Catholiques Féminines*, hoping to obtain its support.

religious life in Québec. In 1923, the *Institut Notre-Dame-du-Bon-Conseil* opened its doors and allowed her to offer women the technical training they needed to become professional social workers, as well as the spiritual training she argued was necessary to pursue this line of work.

In this light, Marie Gérin-Lajoie was a clear expression of the struggle of her time; in Québec and in the Western world in general, societies were in the midst of dealing with the challenges of modernity. This period (end of nineteenth century, beginning of twentieth century) was marked by the emergence of various strategies in reaction to social change, including the development of liberal, ultramontane, and feminist ideological strands. It was a period of complexity where different visions of the ideal social order were put forward, in attempts to bring society into modernity. This is what makes Marie Gérin-Lajoie's story particularly interesting; it makes a contribution to the long-standing debate about Québec's entry into modernity, a debate that has become the cornerstone of the social sciences in French Canada.

Social scientists studying Québec have long tended to conceptualize the social world in terms of a dichotomy between a rural, traditional, and religious society (known among social scientists as the "folk-society"[3]), and an urban, industrial and modern society. Early social scientists and historians[4] placed Québec society, from the Conquest up until the

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[3] For an explanation of the (mis)appropriation by Québec social scientists of the Chicago school's concept of the folk society, see Claude Couture and Claude Denis, "La captation du couple tradition-modernité par la sociographie québécoise," in Canada: Theoretical Discourses/Discours théoriques, eds. Terry Goldie, Carmen Lambert and Rowland Lorimer, Association for Canadian Studies/Association d'études canadiennes (Montréal 1994).

[4] These include Léon Gérin, the members of the Chicago school, Horace Miner and Everett Hughes. After 1945, Marcel Rioux, Hubert Guindon, Jean-Charles Falardeau. Among the historians, nationalists like Maurice Séguin and Michel Brunet, or federalists like Donald Creighton and Fernand Ouellet. Both described French Canadians in the same monolithic fashion. For a complete review of the literature, see: Carl Berger, The Writing of Canadian History, (Toronto 1977); Fernande Roy, Progrès, Harmonie, Liberté, Le libéralisme des milieux d'affaires francophones à Montréal au tournant du siècle, (Montréal 1988); Ronald Rudin, "Revisionism and the Search for a Normal Society: A critique of Recent Québec Historical Writing," Canadian Historical Review, LXXIII, 1 (1992), 30-61.

1950s, on the rural and traditional side, arguing that Québec was a monolithic, isolated society, dominated by clerical elites who promoted a nationalism characterized by the virtues of Catholicism and rural life. According to this interpretation, Québec would have entered modernity abruptly in the 1960s, breaking with this traditionalism. Hence the term "Quiet Revolution".

This interpretation was challenged by a group of "revisionist" historians[5] in the 1970s, who rejected the importance that their predecessors attributed to the Church and to rural life. In their opinion, Catholicism was not necessarily in conflict with urban-industrial values. They argued that Québec was indeed a pluralist society whose members did not resist the idea of an industrial and liberal economy, but rather sought change and progress. They further argued that the Catholic Church was in itself a diversified institution, influenced by a number of ideological trends. Thus, Québec's entry into modernity would come earlier than the 1960s.

Others went further and argued that the use of the urban/rural, traditional/modern dichotomy was an inappropriate and simplistic conceptualization of Québec history.[6] The advent of modernity in Québec society was not an identifiable period of transition that could be tagged as a "revolutionary" decade, but was rather a long and complex process characterized by the interaction between old and new as historian Claude Couture and sociologist Claude Denis have argued:

> The so-called period of transition [...] seems rather to have been characterized by a variety of complex strategies, collective as well as individual. "Old" social practices were indispensable elements in the establishment of industrial societies between 1850 and 1950. There was no brutal rupture between two epochs, but rather a socio-historical process marked by complex and varied strategies, where continuities were as numerous as ruptures.[7]

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[5] This group includes Paul-André Linteau, Jean-Claude Robert, Jacques Rouillard, Normand Séguin, Brian Young, and Allan Greer.

[6] Couture and Denis, "La captation du couple tradition-modernité," 120.

[7] Ibid.: "La période dite de la transition [...] semble plutôt avoir été marquée par un pluralisme de stratégies complexes, tant collectives qu'individuelles. Dans le contexte

The debate surrounding Québec's entry into modernity reflects a much larger debate on the "irredeemably contested nature"[8] of modernity, illustrating not only the lack of consent among social scientists on the definition of modernity, but on the historical moment marking its beginning. In fact, studies that attempt to clarify this debate have only led to "a confirmation of the difficulties of conceptual clarification."[9]

However, despite the difficulty of setting parameters around the concept of modernity, certain key elements can nevertheless allow one to place Marie Gérin-Lajoie in the context of modernity and evaluate her relationship to it. Essentially, it can be agreed upon that modernity is a period where the social world became fascinated by ideas of secularization and rationalization, by the acceptance of scientific explanations, and by the bureaucratization of economic and political practices. Modernity values the idea of a social world governed by the state, or the political, and rejects the idea of a society governed by the principles of religion. In this sense, an integral element of modernity is its banishment of the spiritual from the public realm, triggering an "erosion of meaning,"[10] and hence, a tension between the attachment to the security of "old" social practices and the push towards new, modern ideas, such as the idea of progress. Modernity must thus be seen as an ambiguous cultural project, fraught with conflicting ideas and contradictions. It need not necessarily be understood as an historical period, but rather, as Michel Foucault has suggested, as a struggle between attitudes toward modernity, namely, those that accept it and those that reject it:

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occidental des années 1850 à 1950, des caractéristiques sociales déjà anciennes ont été des éléments indispensables dans la mise en place des sociétés industrielles. Pas de rupture brutale entre deux époques, mais au contraire, des stratégies complexes et variées dans un processus socio-historique où les continuités sont aussi multiples que les ruptures."

[8] Bryan S. Turner, "Periodization and Politics in the Postmodern," in Theories of Modernity and Postmodernity, ed. Bryan S. Turner (London 1990), 1.

[9] Barry Smart, "Modernity, Postmodernity and the Present," in Theories of Modernity, 16-17.

[10] Bryan Turner uses this expression to describe Max Weber's interpretation of the ambiguities of modernity, in "Periodization and Politics in the Postmodern," 6.

> ...instead of trying to distinguish the «modern period» from the «pre» or «post-modern» periods, I think it would be better to understand how the modern attitude came to be in conflict with «counter-modern» attitudes.[11]

Marie Gérin-Lajoie exemplifies this tension between the appeal of certain modern ideas, and the fear of or resistance to others. On the one hand, she was attracted to the opportunities that a modern society could make available to women. Her mother had, in fact, already begun exploring the openings that modernity provided to women in the public life. Marie Lacoste[12] believed that the social conditions created by the new urban and industrial environment invited a rethinking of women's role in society. This sort of rethinking, however, was not unique. The theme of social reform was what spearheaded the feminist movement--more precisely, the social/Christian strand of the feminist movement--in a number of industrialized countries such as Great Britain, France, Germany, the United States and Canada.[13] While working class women began uniting their efforts to improve their working conditions, women of the bourgeoisie also came together to fight the many problems resulting from industrialization and urbanization, including dangerous working conditions for women and children, unsanitary housing, malnutrition, and infant mortality. Parallel to this philanthropic mission, bourgeois women

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[11] Michel Foucault, "Qu'est-ce que les Lumières?," in Dits et écrits 1954-1988 par Michel Foucault, eds. Daniel Defert and François Ewald (Paris 1994), 568: "...plutôt que de vouloir distinguer la «période moderne» des époques «pré» ou «post-moderne», je crois qu'il vaudrait mieux chercher comment l'attitude de la modernité, depuis qu'elle s'est formée, s'est trouvée en lutte avec des attitudes de «contre-modernité»."

[12] In the Gérin-Lajoie family, both mother and daughter carried the same first name. To avoid confusion (for the mother is well-known for her attempts to win women's right to vote in Québec) I shall refer to the mother, throughout this thesis, by her maiden name, Marie Lacoste.

[13] Normand Guèvremont, ed. Idéologies et régimes politiques, (Ottawa 1992) 847. What has been labeled social/Christian feminism is the type of movement that is of interest to this thesis since it is the movement to which belonged Marie Gérin-Lajoie and her mother, as well as most Social Catholic women in France. However, it must be noted that the nineteenth century witnessed the development of several strands of feminism, including the more militant "equal rights" movement as well as that put forward by socialists. The nature of these different forms of feminism will be examined in more detail in the following chapter.

began making other demands, such as the right to vote and the right to a higher education.[14] In this sense, Marie Lacoste was, as historian Marta Danylewycz put it, a "leader among Montreal's feminists."[15]

She founded, in 1907, the *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste*, an umbrella organization that united women of both secular and religious backgrounds. The *Fédération* allowed Marie Lacoste and her group to reconcile their goals as social feminists with their religious values, prompting them to explore the field of Christian feminism.[16] Marie Lacoste therefore fought to convince her peers that women's identity as defined by the Catholic Church--that is women's moral responsibilities as wives and mothers--was not necessarily incompatible with the demands she was putting forward as a feminist. She continued fighting for women's right to vote, women's right to a higher education, and married women's right to control their own salaries,[17] but did so in terms that referred to Catholic virtues.[18] She used this kind of rhetoric to justify, among other things, the participation of secular women in the field of social services. During this time, social work was mostly in the hands of the Catholic Church, and more specifically in the hands of feminine religious communities.[19] French Canadian bourgeois women who wanted to participate in philanthropic activities often felt marginalized. The union of religious and secular women within the *Fédération* 's membership was a conscious effort by Marie Lacoste to give secular women a larger role in the field of philanthropy.[20]

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[14] Ibid.

[15] Marta Danylewycz, Profession religieuse, Un choix pour les Québécoises, 1840-1920 (Montréal 1988), 173: "chef de file des féministes montréalaises."

[16] Le Collectif Clio (Micheline Dumont, Michèle Jean, Marie Lavigne and Jennifer Stoddart), L'histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles (Montréal 1992), 347.

[17] Ibid., 350 and 359.

[18] Danylewycz, Profession religieuse, 176-178.

[19] Le Collectif Clio, L'histoire des femmes au Québec, 345 and Danylewycz, Profession religieuse, 172-73.

[20] Danylewycz, Profession religieuse, 174-181.

Marie Gérin-Lajoie grew up in these surroundings, and in a sense, continued the work her mother had begun, particularly in the area of higher education and social work. She was especially intent on providing secular bourgeois women with a more important and more autonomous role in society. However, she went farther than her mother had in taking advantage of modernity's openings by calling for the professionalization of the work done by secular women in the area of social services. Her feminist goals led her to explore the field of science, and the idea that social problems could be solved by understanding them scientifically, (hence her interest in sociology) and by applying to them scientific solutions (such as methods of prevention as opposed to charity). She wanted to provide women with training based on this kind of knowledge.

Although certain aspects of modernity were appealing to her, then, for what she called "le relèvement féminin" or the improvement of women's situation, she remained nevertheless suspicious because modernity threatened a principle she firmly believed in: the idea that spirituality had to govern public life. She argued that order in society was only possible if people and institutions were motivated by moral principles. Since morality was best defined by the Catholic Church, her role was to make religion legitimate in a modern, public setting. This led her to explore the Social Catholic movement which, on many levels, articulated her own preoccupations. This was a movement led by lay Catholics in Europe as a response to the social question and to the separation of the Catholic Church and French State. Social Catholics spoke of reinstating a Catholic social order in society by teaching the bourgeoisie how to help the working class prevent their own misery. Marie Gérin-Lajoie linked this moral responsability of the bourgeoisie to the Catholic idea of the providential order of nature which, she contended, taught societies how to avoid anarchy by making riches available only to those who were capable of using them responsibly, and by protecting the less fortunate by providing them with relief.[21] The idea that the

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[21] Gérin-Lajoie, Cours préparatoire à l'action sociale, 5.

bourgeoisie were morally responsible for the welfare of the poor, and consequently, for the peaceful order of society, is related to one of the most fundamental principals of the Roman Catholic Church; the "absolute requirement to be generous to those in need (a requirement which goes back to Christ)."[22] Generosity, charity and devotion characterized the Church's teachings on social justice, expressed first in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (1891) and in subsequent encyclicals over a period of one hundred years.[23] Marie Gérin-Lajoie identified with these teachings, and therefore explored ways of applying them to public life. She came to interpret Social Catholicism in such a way that would allow her to fulfill her religious and feminist goals, thus experiencing in her own life the profound diversity and contradictions of the modern world.

The personal tension she experienced between her attraction to modernity on the one hand and her concern for its secularist project on the other must not be seen as an isolated struggle. Her effort at bringing these two elements together, of making two seemingly conflicting visions of society compatible, is an expression of Québec society's experience with the contradictions of the modern times. Not that the answers or solutions she brought to this problem are representative, but her dilemma in dealing with modernity certainly is. The sociologist Robert Nisbet has demonstrated, for example, how the modern notion of individualism was both embraced and rejected by members of French society. The perceived rupture between the individual and his/her community was seen by some as emancipation or the advent of liberty, and by others as the disappearance of morality. In other words, a single idea could be interpreted in nineteenth century France as progress and decadence, depending on one's ideological tendencies.[24] Marie Gérin-Lajoie personifies this struggle by both embracing some of the changes being brought on by modernity while

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[22] Bowker, John, The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions (Oxford 1997), 822.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Robert Nisbet, La tradition sociologique (Paris 1966), 63.

at the same time, refusing to let go of "old" or "traditional" notions. It is her search for an alliance of old and new that is representative.

This thesis shall attempt to illustrate modernity's complexities by examining one person's struggle with the implications of living in the modern world. Marie Gérin-Lajoie's strategy, that is her efforts at trying to combine certain elements of modernity with values that fell outside the definition of the modern project, resulted in a proposal to establish a religious congregation adapted to modern society. In other words, she called for a congregation that was flexible and open, allowing for a much closer relationship between religious and secular women, with a view to unite religion and the modern world. Within such a structure, she would be able to offer secular women training in the latest scientific methods of social work, while at the same time transmitting to them, and consequently to everyone with whom they would come into contact, a spiritual philosophy of social work.

By portraying Marie Gérin-Lajoie as a site of modernity's complexities, this thesis shall challenge the view that early twentieth-century Québec was a monolithic, traditional society that was closed in on itself and that resisted change and progress. It shall add weight to the revisionist interpretation of Québec history, which contends that French Canadian society at the turn of the century was open to foreign ideas, and therefore characterized by various (and sometimes conflicting) ideological strands as it dealt with the challenges of modernity. It shall also examine Marie Gérin-Lajoie's work with and for women through the prism of feminism.

Marie Gérin-Lajoie produced a variety of writings that facilitate the historian's task of interpreting her dilemmas, her motivations, and her ambitions. Her numerous notes, articles, letters, and personal library still remain at the *Institut Notre-Dame du Bon-Conseil* in Montreal, where the Sisters have begun classifying the abundant sources left behind by their former Mother Superior, and have opened their Archives to the public.

These sources are examined in this thesis and can generally be divided into two categories: those that shed light on Marie Gérin-Lajoie's intellectual explorations, or that help understand *the process* that led to the proposal of her religious congregation, and those that express *the result* of her explorations, or the conclusions she arrived at after struggling with the issues that preoccupied her.

The first set of sources include a log-book in which she noted her thoughts on different readings. She organized her notes according to themes such as "Action sociale", "Christianisme", and "Féminisme", to name only a few. Her notes include the name of the authors and the title of the books, followed by a short paragraph on her appreciation of their works. These notes provide valuable information on the authors who interested her, and on the motivations behind her readings. The abundant correspondence between herself and her mother (written during the time she spent in Europe and in the United States) is filled with her opinions on different matters, such as American methods of social work and French Social Catholic organizations. Finally, the itinerary she followed when she went to Europe indicates the people she planned on meeting and the organizations she planned on visiting. These sources are particularly useful to discover her interests, her concerns, and her intellectual development.

The second set of sources includes a course she elaborated for the students who attended the first college for French-Canadian women in Québec, the *École d'enseignement supérieur*. This course presents coherent, well-thought-out arguments. It is in a sense a written expression of her social vision, the coming together of her thought on different issues including the role of women in society, the social question, social work, religion, Social Catholicism, and modernity. As well, the proposals she submitted to the Catholic clergy for the establishment of her congregation provide a blueprint of her solution for the ills of an urban, industrial and secular society. They describe the institution that she believed would unite religion and modernity. Her correspondence with certain members of the clergy adds additional elements of information on this subject. Finally, her memoirs

express her recollection of the establishment of the *Institut Notre-Dame du Bon-Conseil*, and provide information on her relationship with the Church.

In addition to these manuscripts, two publications are of invaluable use. The journal La Bonne Parole, which was the press organ of the *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste*, and for which Marie Gérin-Lajoie was the editor, offers a published account of her opinions on different topics and sheds light on her relationship and interaction with several key players of the Social Catholic movement. And to better understand how her ideas relate to those of French Social Catholics, the published collections of the presentations given at the annual *Semaine sociale de France*, one of France's most important institutions for the development of the Social Catholic project, provide a backdrop against which to examine her writings.

Throughout the thesis, theses sources shall be interpreted in such a way as to better grasp the subjective meaning of Marie Gérin-Lajoie's actions. In this sense, it could be said that the following chapters are based on a Weberian method of analysis, which contends that to understand social phenomena, it is essential to understand the motives of individuals, as Julien Freund explains: "that is, the reasons which have led men [sic] to act and the goals which they are pursuing,"[25] the idea that actions are based on will, and that individuals have personal reasons (agendas) to act as they do. It is thus important to seek the meaning that individuals give to things, since "meaning is never given *in* the object, it is not a quality inherent to it..."[26]

Feminist readership theory complements this interpretive method quite nicely and, given Marie Gérin-Lajoie's extensive readings, is an appropriate method of analysis to better understand how her intellectual framework was constructed. The readership theory allows one to go farther than simply interpreting the texts, and to take into account the

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[25] Julien Freund, "German Sociology in the Time of Max Weber," in A History of Sociological Analysis, eds. Tom Bottomore and Robert Nisbet (New York 1978), 168.

[26] Ibid., 169.

interaction between reader and text.[27] How did her experience as a woman, as a bourgeoise, as a feminist and as a Catholic affect her readings? What strategy did she adopt when she read different texts and how did this strategy affect her selection of information as well as the meaning she gave to the texts?

Before going on to analyze Marie Gérin-Lajoie's thought and projects, an introduction to the socio-political context of both Canada (in particular Québec) and France at the turn of the century is necessary. Chapter One will outline the principal social and political currents of both these societies, with a particular emphasis on the impact of the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum*, which gave a significant impetus to the Social Catholic movement in both France and Québec.

The following chapter will then place Marie Gérin-Lajoie within this context, shedding some light on her ties with Social Catholicism in her own society and in France. It will place her at the centre of a network she built for herself, and thus clarify the strategies she developed to obtain information from different sources within the Social Catholic movement, with the goal of elaborating her own vision. The description of this network will be based on the image of "bridges" that allowed her to "cross the Atlantic" and come into contact with French Social Catholics, as well as crossing gender lines in order to integrate the male strand of Social Catholicism at home.

With her place in the local and international context well established, Chapter Three can then proceed to explore the similarities and differences between her thought and that of the French Social Catholics, in particular, those of the *Semaine sociale de France*. By closely examining each of their discourses on the use of female study circles--one of Social Catholicism's most popular educational tools--and by determining what ideas Marie Gérin-Lajoie agreed with and the extent to which she developed her own opinions, it will be

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[27] The idea of an interaction between the text and the reader is well explained in Patrocinio P. Schweickart, "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading," in Gender and Reading, Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contents, eds. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart (Baltimore 1986).

possible to form a clearer picture of her thought, and begin to understand her conception of modernity, feminism and religion.

Finally, chapter Four will examine her proposal for a flexible religious congregation, with a view to explaining how these different ideological strands came together in her discourse. How did she build her arguments in order to justify unorthodox ideas, such as creating a new space for lay women in public life or providing them with a scientific education aimed at solving social problems, all within a religious context?

The conclusion will then place her work within Québec historiography in order to demonstrate the inconsistencies of portraying early twentieth-century Québec as monolithic and un-modern. It will also evaluate whether her project can be considered a success: even though she succeeded in establishing her religious congregation and in providing secular women with an education geared toward a career in professional social work, it is clear that her larger plan to make spirituality an integral part of public life in Québec society failed, consequently raising many questions about the complexity of Québec society at the time.

Chapter One

Modern Visions at the Turn of the Century

How could a devoutly Catholic woman fit into a modern world? This is the challenge of Marie Gérin-Lajoie's life in the early years of the twentieth century. The economic, political and social landscapes were changing dramatically as politicians and intellectuals were rethinking how society should function. Secularism was the most worrisome development for a devoted Catholic such as herself: modern society was relegating religion to an increasingly limited sphere of life.[1] The move toward complete political and social secularization was most aggressive in nineteenth century France, and in Québec's Catholic circles, the events surrounding the eventual separation of Church and State in 1905 were closely observed. Marie Gérin-Lajoie feared the same fate for the Catholic Church in Québec.

Despite her apprehension about modernity's secular project, other aspects of the modern world appealed to her, and she was stimulated by these movements too. First, the Social Catholic movement developed as a reaction to the threat of secularization, and Marie Gérin-Lajoie could easily identify with its ideas as they articulated her own preoccupations. Social Catholicism provided Catholics with a strategy that would allow them to live within modernity without sacrificing the presence of religion in the public sphere. Secondly, the modern world, which brought with it poverty and social misery, was also a setting that favored the development of a popular strand of the feminist movement, particularly among Christian women who began defining public roles for themselves through philanthropy.

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[1] The key dimensions of secularization include the decline of the Church's influence, the decrease of rates of religious practice among the faithful and increasing difficulty in recruiting its clergy. This is a process related to industrialization in that the development of the working class escaped the Church's influence, allowing the secularization of social life. See Raymond Boudon, Philippe Besnard, Mohamed Cherkaoui and Bernard-Pierre Lécuyer (eds.), Dictionnaire de la sociologie, (Paris 1996), 203.

Marie Gérin-Lajoie was attracted to this product of modernity since it gave her the opportunity and the tools to improve the lives of women.

In the midst of these trends of modern society, Marie Gérin-Lajoie struggled with a way to bring them all together in a coherent fashion. Before examining the development of her thought and projects as they pertained to her own society, it is essential to place her in this larger context of change and questioning, because the events unfolding in Europe had repercussions in Québec and around the world. Key European countries, through the process of building their empires, had made themselves the intellectual and cultural models of their colonies and former colonies. Whether it was as a result of their admiration for Europe, or as a result of force, many countries adopted European institutions and adhered to European intellectual movements. Indeed, "most continents are adopting Europe's civilization, including its outward expressions, its customs, including fashion, tastes and even sports."[2] As the centre of inspiration for a new social order, Europe had an impact on the way society was organized throughout the world.[3] The aggressive development of secularization in nineteenth century France, the movements that reacted to it, such as Social Catholicism, as well as the feminine strand of Social Catholicism all had a significant impact on Québec society and, more specifically, on Marie Gérin-Lajoie.

Secularization

The separation of Church and State in France would haunt the Catholic Church in Québec as well as Marie Gérin-Lajoie, who saw it as a forewarning of what might happen in their own society. The legal separation took place in France in 1905 after centuries of conflicts between the two. The persistent clashes of the nineteenth century were in fact the final outcome of this longtime friction. Nineteenth century politicians and intellectuals

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[2] René Rémond, Le XIXe siècle, 1815-1914 (Paris 1974), 243: "la plupart des continents empruntent à l'Europe sa civilisation, ses moeurs jusque dans la forme extérieure, l'habillement, les usages, les goûts, les sports même."

[3] Ibid.

often claimed the anti-clerical heritage left behind by their predecessors:[4] "[anticlericals] do not claim to innovate, but on the contrary, they wish to defend the traditions of both the gallican Church and of the French State."[5] Indeed, in France, the tensions can be traced back to the fourteenth century, during the reign of Philippe LeBel, with the initial manifestations of gallicanism, or the idea that the King was absolutely independent of the Church since his authority was acquired directly from God, without the intermediary of Rome.[6] This idea was reiterated and made official by Louis XIV in 1673, who thus reasserted the notion that the Church had no place in the affairs of the State.[7] The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries' philosophical movement went even further than gallicanism by contesting the Catholic Church's presence not only in French politics, but in society as well. Calls were made for an autonomous civil society and for the secularization of the State: in short, for the complete separation of the religious and secular spheres.[8] The nineteenth century conflict between Church and State, then, was first and foremost a continuation of this prior movement to separate the religious and the profane.[9]

Despite this long tradition of attempts at separating the Church and State, modern anti-clericalism was unique in its intensity. A new political element, democracy, came into play that increased the feelings of hostility towards the Church.[10] Thus the radical years of the French Revolution posed the most severe threat to the Church's autonomy up to that point. But during the nineteenth century, according to one historian, "democracy allowed freedom of propaganda to the various groups in the State, and among them the

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[4] René Rémond, L'anti-cléricalisme en France de 1815 à nos jours (Paris 1976), 51.

[5] Ibid., 52: "[les anti-cléricaux] ne prétendent pas à innover, mais entendent, au contraire, défendre les traditions tant de l'Église gallicane que de l'Etat français."

[6] Michel Mourre, Dictionnaire encyclopédique d'histoire (Paris 1978), 1939.

[7] Ibid., 1940.

[8] Rémond, Le XIXe siècle, 198.

[9] Ibid., 199.

[10] Owen Chadwick, The Secularization of the European Mind in the 19th Century (Cambridge 1975), 116.

Churches."[11] The Catholic Church was a social force that chose to ally itself with the conservative right; this preoccupied the Republicans, whose vision of a secular society clashed with that of the Church.[12] In fact, the Ultramontane movement, a wing that developed in this context within the Catholic Church, fought secularization and rejected other changes brought on by industrialization and urbanization; it saw the Church as the dominant institution in society, as it defended the primacy and infallibility of the Pope.[13] This anti-liberal drive, expressed in two papal encyclicals--*Quanta Cura* and the *Syllabus*--made clear the Church's condemnation of progress, liberalism and the modern civilization.[14] In the face of this clerical offensive, anti-clerical sentiments intensified in French society. Hostility towards the Church grew, particularly within the "gauche communarde", and later, among the Republicans whose goal was to strip the Church of its social and political influence.[15] They slowly began secularizing society by re-establishing the divorce law and removing religious symbols from certain public areas like hospitals and courts.[16] As the State began breaking its ties with it, the Church eventually moderated its position. As Pope Léon XIII communicated in his 1893 encyclical, the *Ralliement*, the Church would attempt to organize around the Republic as a way to safeguard the *Concordat*, the agreement signed in 1801 by the Church and the French State recognizing Catholicism as the religion of the majority.

Despite this effort at maintaining its political ties to the Republic, two significant issues finally led to the legal separation of Church and State in 1905. First, the school question took on the form of an aggressive battle against Catholics.[17] It became, in fact, a

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[11] Ibid., 117.

[12] Jean-Marie Mayeur, Les débuts de la IIIe République, 1871-1898 (Paris 1973), 103.

[13] Ibid.

[14] Pierre Albertini, La France du XIXe siècle, 1815-1914, (Paris 1995), 89.

[15] Mayeur, Les débuts de la IIIe République, 111.

[16] Albertini, La France du XIXe siècle, 97.

[17] Ibid., 98.

battle to determine who was to define French values.[18] Republicans saw public education as central to the development of a society based on equality, and fundamental to converting new generations to the Republic, as historian Jean-Marie Mayeur has indicated: "the establishment of a secular education is therefore the establishment of the Republic."[19] They saw Catholic education as superstitious and unpatriotic, and worked to remove Catholicism from public education with the Ferry laws of 1881 and 1882, which secularized programmes and staff in primary schools and made attendance free and mandatory. Jules Ferry, minister of Instruction, also instituted a system of secondary education for girls as well as colleges for training lay women to become teachers. As historian Robert Tombs has argued, the issues surrounding Ferry's educational reforms represented "a struggle for the soul of France between two institutions."[20]

In addition to the school question, the Dreyfus Affair, this political scandal based on the wrongful accusation of a Jewish Army Captain for treason, divided the French by fueling Catholic antagonism toward the Republic, and reinforcing Republican anti-clericalism. The political scandal pitted the Republican government against a newly assembled right-wing and anti-semitic coalition, including old royalists and Catholics. When the scandal came to an end in 1899, the Republicans were intent on rendering the Church powerless.[21] From one Republican government to the other, from that of Waldeck-Rousseau to Clémenceau, the Church was hit with one anti-clerical law after another.[22] In 1901, the law on Associations forced religious orders to seek authorization from the State, and members of congregations that had not obtained authorization were prohibited from teaching.[23] The following year, three thousand schools run by Catholic

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[18] Robert Tombs, France 1814-1914 (London and New York 1996), 139.

[19] Mayeur, Les débuts de la IIIe République, 113: "fonder l'école laïque, c'est aussi fonder la République."

[20] Tombs, France 1814-1914 142.

[21] Ibid., 467.

[22] Gérard Cholvy and Yves-Marie Hilaire, Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine, 1880-1930 (Toulouse 1986), 101-110.

[23] Madeleine Rebérioux, La république radicale? 1898-1914 (Paris 1975), 66.

nuns were closed. In 1904, a law was adopted to forbid any religious order from teaching. And finally, in 1905, the Republicans declared that the State favored liberty of conscience and therefore, would not recognize nor finance any religious institution.[24] This was the legal separation of Church and State. As a result, the Church suffered material losses and was stripped of virtually all political influence.

Marie Gérin-Lajoie firmly believed that religion had a determining role to play in public life as a way to maintain a Christian moral order. Witnessing how the French State had succeeded in completely crushing the Church's political influence and institutional base, she worked to prevent this from happening in Québec, where the Church, contrary to what had happened in France, still enjoyed a strong position in society at the turn of the century.

The Catholic Church in Québec grew institutionally during this period and actually increased its areas of influence. The Act of 1867 had established in the province of Québec a governmental structure that favored the Church; the powers that were given provincial jurisdiction corresponded with the Church's interests. The Civil Code, private property, and especially, education and public health were areas that the Catholic Church already held in firm grip.[25] Moreover, the majority of the members of the National Assembly were Catholic.[26] This situation legitimized, in the Church's eyes, its implication in Québec politics. In 1867 for example, the Church openly supported Macdonald's Conservatives in the federal election; and in 1871, its Ultramontane wing published a "Catholic programme" detailing the profile of "suitable" candidates.[27] In addition to its presence on the political scene, the Church was "omnipresent"[28] in the social sector. Its control of parishes,

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[24] Ibid., 71.

[25] Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert, Histoire du Québec contemporain, Tome 1, De la Confédération à la crise (1867-1929) (Montréal 1989), 260.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Fernande Roy, Histoire des idéologies au Québec, aux XIXe et XXe siècles (Montréal 1993), 51-52.

[28] This term is borrowed from Linteau et al., Histoire du Québec contemporain.

schools, social services and health provided it with an institutional network of influence which made it indispensable to social life in Québec.[29]

Despite its influence and visibility in Québec society, it was nevertheless on the defensive for a number of reasons, including the social impact of industrialization and urbanization and the arrival to power of two Liberal governments: that of Félix-Gabriel Marchand at the provincial level in 1897, and of Wilfrid Laurier at the federal level in 1896. This was perceived as a threatening situation for the Church, especially given the fact that politicians had already been, for some time, increasingly resistant to the Church's intervention in electoral politics. This resistance was expressed clearly when the courts cancelled, in 1876, two elections because of the "unwarranted influence" of the Church during the campaigns.[30] The multiplication of parishes in the last decades of the nineteenth century--a phenomenon that could otherwise be perceived as an increase of the Church's influence and as a sign of its stability--was in fact a defensive reaction against the threat of secularization.

But as in France, it was the area of education that remained the most sensitive for the Church in Québec, especially given the events surrounding educational reform in France. According to historian Ruby Heap, "the main fear that haunted Québec's clergy was the establishment of the educational state, as it was instituted in France by Jules Ferry and the Republicans."[31] Although the Church in Québec still controlled what was being taught, it nevertheless began losing some ground as the new Marchand government bowed to pressures of Liberal businessmen who called for a reform of the system. The Liberal press had already been for some time criticizing the "precarious" state of education both at the elementary and secondary levels, accusing it of not keeping up with the needs of a

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[29] Linteau et al, Histoire du Québec contemporain, 260.

[30] Ibid.

[31] Ruby Heap, "La ligue de l'enseignement (1902-1904): Héritage du passé et nouveaux défis," Revue d'histoire de l'Amérique française, vol 36, no3 (décembre 1982), 363: "l'avènement de l'État enseignant, tel qu'il s'est institué en France sous Jules Ferry et les Républicains, constitue la principale hantise du clergé québécois."

changing society.[32] Like their Republican peers in France, Liberal thinkers in Québec supported a free and mandatory education, controlled by the State.[33] In this sense, they too pursued the anti-clerical tradition of their predecessors. In their case, mid-nineteenth century liberals (les Rouges), inspired by the European liberal movement, had lobbied for the secularization of schools and the establishment of a government-run education system.[34]

The Marchand government had attempted to establish a Ministry of Education, but without success: the project was defeated by the Legislative Council, which was comprised mainly of Ultramontanes.[35] The Catholic clergy in Québec therefore remained suspicious and defensive because it interpreted these events through the lens of their French counterparts.

Catholics then, including Marie Gérin-Lajoie, saw their task as protecting and maintaining what the Church in Québec had acquired. Marie Gérin-Lajoie chose to work towards establishing a new moral order in the modern world where spirituality could serve a purpose, thus making illegitimate any attempt to banish it from public life. One of her strategies was to get involved in the Social Catholic movement.

Social Catholicism

Marie Gérin-Lajoie was attracted to the French Social Catholic movement because it offered an alternative to the Republican or secular social project. She did not reject the socio-economic changes resulting from a liberal economy, nor did she reject modernity. But as a Catholic, she remained firmly convinced that religion had an important contribution to make in alleviating the misery caused by industrialization and urbanization. She therefore drew on many ideas from the Social Catholic movement, which shared these

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[32] Ibid., 341.
[33] Ibid.
[34] Ibid.
[35] Ibid., 342.

concerns. If she could apply these principles to her own society, this would prevent the kind of secularization that had triumphed in France from doing so in Québec. Like French Social Catholics then, she fought to justify the presence of spirituality in the modern world.

In the context of the particularly aggressive move toward secularization in nineteenth century France, the Church, as an institution, resisted the Republicans' attempts at banning it from public life. The nineteenth century as a whole, in fact, was marked by this conflict between Church and State, a conflict that proposed two very different visions of the ideal social order. At one end, the Republicans called for a nation where citizens were the only legitimate source of power and where social attitudes were dominated by a scientific faith in reason and progress. The Catholic Church on the other hand saw religion as an indispensable moral regulator of politics and society.[36] This is not to say, however, that the Catholic response to secularization was uniform. In fact, one can identify, in the second half of the nineteenth century, four general reactions within the Church.

The *Intégristes* insisted on the primacy of the spiritual. In their view, all authority had to come from God, therefore making the ideas of democracy and secularization illegitimate. Another group, the liberal Catholics, sought to harmonize the spiritual and the political; their goal was to reconcile the Church with the modern times. Bourgeois Catholics argued that the spiritual and the political had to occupy separate spheres. Unlike the *Intégristes* however, they did not consider one to be dominated by the other. In their view, religion was not to be involved in political issues, but it did have its place in a modern society as long as it was considered a private matter of individual conscience. Finally, popular Catholics, a "little-known group"[37] found mostly in rural areas, felt the impact of several currents. They remained very superstitious while being faithful to certain secular traditions.[38]

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[36] Tombs, France 1814-1914, 73-74.

[37] Odile Sarti, The Ligue Patriotique des Françaises, 1902-1933. A Feminine Response to the Secularization of French Society, (New York & London 1992), 8.

[38] These categories were defined by Émile Poulat, Église contre bourgeoisie, introduction au devenir du catholicisme actuel, (Paris 1977), and reiterated by historian

Social Catholics, who proposed to make religion an integral part of the urban and industrial society, or a social norm, fit into the *intransigeant* tradition,[39] which had rejected liberalism and fought to maintain the primacy of Christian principles in State affairs and in society.[40] They went further than the *Intransigeants*, however, by addressing the socio-economic problems of modernity in an attempt to spread their doctrine throughout the masses. Social Catholicism can thus be defined as:

> an historical development of intransigence that seeks to respond to the development of a situation created by the new society, to reduce a new type of dehiscence* --rich and poor confronted class against class--inaugurated by the Revolution and maintained by industrialization.[41]

Contrary to liberal Catholics who believed in the reconciliation of the Church with the Republican State (and therefore in secularization), Social Catholicism, which opposed liberalism and secularism, was bound to have a tense relationship to democracy. This, however, should not lead one to conclude to a straightforward anti-democratic stance. While it opposed representative democracy for its lack of precision, it defended the idea of direct democracy, which it considered a better reflection of the population's concerns. This complex positioning relative to democracy can be seen in the analysis offered by Maurice Deslandres, a leading French Social Catholic intellectual of the early twentieth century:

Odile Sarti, The Ligue Patriotique des Françaises, 1902-1933, 6-7.

[39] Gérard Cholvy, La religion en France de la fin du XVIIIe à nos jours (Paris 1991), 44.

[40] Poulat, Église contre bourgeoisie, 110.

* This is a botanical term which refers to the spontaneous opening of an otherwise closed organ in certain plants. (Larousse encyclopédique en couleurs, Tome 6, Paris, 2625.) In this context, it seems Marie Gérin-Lajoie was refering to the gap that opened between classes since the Revolution as opposed to the organic unity that society should have.

[41] Ibid., 117: "un développement historique de l'intransigeantisme qui entend répondre à un développement de la situation engendrée par la nouvelle société, réduire la déhiscence, d'un type jusqu'alors inconnu--riches et pauvres affrontés classes contre classes--inaugurée par la Révolution et opérée par l'industrialisation."

> It is obvious that the law reputed in the democratic doctrine to be the expression of the people's voice cannot be considered as such if it is not voted by representatives. It is obvious that social laws that need a particular authority can only obtain it by being subjected to a popular vote that would confirm that they are the expression of the nation's voice.[42]

In defending the idea of referenda, Maurice Deslandres wanted France to follow the "encouraging" examples of the Swiss and American democratic institutions. However, Social Catholics argued that spiritual principles had the moral authority to guide society in its beliefs and, therefore, the State in its policies. When Pope Léon XIII issued his 1891 encyclical, *Rerum Novarum*, in which he condemned social conditions resulting from industrialization, Social Catholics appropriated the document as their Magna Carta. While *Rerum Novarum* was mostly an answer to the social question, Catholics who were preoccupied with secularization found that the Encyclical could also offer a blueprint for an alternative social model to secularization. Social Catholics' strategy, then, was to establish a Christian social order by tackling the socio-economic ills of the industrial economy. Bourgeois women, who already played a role in the area of philanthropy, took advantage of the Pope's instructions by finding in them a justification for their involvement in the Social Catholic movement. Social Catholic women's groups, such as the popular *Ligue Patriotique des Françaises*, gave women the opportunity to make a contribution to the building of the Christian social order. If Marie Gérin-Lajoie could apply this strategy in the context of her own society, which she tried to do by making religion relevant to public issues such as the social question, then she would discredit any movement toward complete secularization.

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[42] Maurice Deslandres, "Influence de l'Evolution sociale sur l'organisation politique de la Démocratie,", Semaine sociale de France (Bordeaux 1909), 259: "Il est évident que la loi qui est réputée dans la doctrine démocratique être l'expression de la volonté du peuple ne peut passer pour telle, si elle n'est votée que par des représentants et qu'elle manque alors du prestige. Il est évident que les lois sociales qui ont besoin d'une autorité particulière, ne pourraient s'en revêtir qu'en se retrempant, en quelques sortes, par un vote populaire qui ne permette plus de douter qu'elles soient la réelle expression de la volonté nationale."

The end of the nineteenth century was indeed characterized by working class difficulties in both France and Québec. In France, the idea that working classes were dangerous classes developed through the century, from the cholera epidemic of 1832 to the Paris Commune, culminating with the economic difficulties of the end of the century and the first decade of the twentieth century. The social question in this context would appear more important than ever and be framed in bourgeois circles in terms of "dangerous classes."[43]

A depression affected the country with an "exceptional intensity"[44] during the 1880s and early 1890s, in contrast to the strong economic growth that it benefited from throughout the first half of the century. The growth rate of 1.3% between 1820 and 1865 dropped to 0.6% between 1865 and 1895, and even lower in the 1880s.[45] The rural industries were unable to overcome the free-trade agreements that France had signed with England a few decades earlier, and urban crafts workers could no longer sustain their businesses.[46] As for the large industrial plants, which up until this time were short on staff, they were now laying their workers off. Thus the period of labour shortage was reversed. This produced a workforce increasingly dependent on industrial wages,[47] and reinforced the development of paternalistic relationships between employers and workers.[48]

The period from the 1880s to the First World War, which witnessed a short period of recovery beginning in 1896, was characterized by strike activity in France's urban

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[43] Tombs, France 1814-1914, 278-9.

[44] Gérard Noiriel, Les ouvriers dans la société française, XIXe-XXe siècle (Paris 1986), 83.

[45] Albertini, La France du XIXe siècle, 128.

[46] Noiriel, Les ouvriers dans la société française, 84-86.

[47] Tombs, France 1814-1914, 289. In identifying this industrial trend, Tombs relies on the analysis of Gérard Noiriel. In France during the nineteenth century, a number of small towns in the countryside were industrialized. Joan Scott and Louise Tilly in Les femmes, le travail et la famille (Paris 1987), 101, identify mining and textiles as the early industrial sectors that created a "new type of city" such as Roubaix, Stockport and Preston. In French Modern (Chicago 1995), Paul Rabinow also examines large-scale industrial schemes as well as urban transformation in Paris and Mulhouse.

[48] Tombs, France 1814-1914, 289.

centres that reached unprecendeted levels. Historian Gérard Noiriel maintains that an intense movement of collective mobilization won the working class over, " to such an extent that this period represents without a doubt the height of the working class movement."[49] Michelle Perrot has demonstrated that strike activity increased tenfold between 1866 and 1911 among the industrial population. Her study indicates that in 1866, there was one striker for every 186 industrial workers. In 1911, there was one for every 26.[50]

Witnessing the economic and social misery that fed this working class militancy, Social Catholics defended the idea that they defined as "social justice". They believed that the bourgeoisie had a duty to help the poor not by giving them charity, but by giving them the necessary tools to help themselves, such as unions, workers' associations, youth organizations, and women's groups. In short, their goal was social reform as opposed to traditional charity. In the process of undertaking these reforms, and by using these associations as intermediaries between themselves and the working class, Social Catholics promoted their vision of an ideal social order based on Catholic principles. They wanted to improve the conditions of the working class, but their goal was not to create a classless society. Their vision of society included the maintenance of bourgeois hegemony.

Marie Gérin-Lajoie was a firm believer in social justice and spent her life promoting it in her own society, which was experiencing similar socio-economic problems as France. As such, she could easily identify with many aspects of the French Social Catholic discourse.

In Canada, the Macdonald government's "National Policy" on economic development had had a significant impact on Québec's economy. Adopted in 1878, this policy was based on an aggressive protectionism that was meant to help build a trans-

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[49] Noiriel, Les ouvriers dans la société française, 99: "à tel point que, de toute l'histoire du mouvement ouvrier français, cette époque représente sans conteste l'apogée."

[50] Michelle Perrot, Les ouvriers en grève, France 1871-1890, Tome 1 (Paris 1974), 53.

Canadian railway and consequently, facilitate western colonization and boost the production of eastern industries.[51] As a result of this policy, the last decades of the nineteenth century were prosperous ones for Québec: the agricultural sector became an industry specialized in ranching and dairy production, the manufacturing sector prospered with the production of railway parts, of shoes, leather, wood products, and sugar. In most of these sectors, the growth rate was significant: manufacturing production rose by 50% during the 1880s.[52] In 1896, the production of hydro-electricity and mineral development gave an additional boost to the economy.[53] As the production of manufactured goods doubled, the urban population increased dramatically. The urban proportion of Québec's population rose from 14.9% to 23.8% between 1871 and 1891.[54]

Contrary to what Québec historiography has traditionally shown, there is much evidence of the presence, at the turn of the century, of a dynamic French Canadian business class.[55] The majority of French-Canadians in the industrial sector were nevertheless concentrated in low-skilled jobs.[56] This meant that they received low wages, that they were often malnourished and that they lived in poor, urban housing. As might be expected, vigorous union activism developed both among skilled and unskilled workers.[57]

The Church in Québec reacted in two ways to the increase of working class problems. The Ultramontanes simply rejected industrialization and urbanization, which, according to them, were not only a source of misery for the poor, but also a threat to public morality. This ultra-conservative strand of Catholics--whose leading figures were the bishop of Montreal, Mgr Ignace Bourget and his colleague in Trois-Rivière, Louis-François Laflèche--promoted the ideal of a rural society dominated by the Church. They

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[51] Jean-François Cardin, Claude Couture, Gratien Allaire, Histoire du Canada, Espace et différences (Presses de l'Université Laval 1996), 69.

[52] Linteau et al., Histoire du Québec contemporain, Tome 1,79.

[53] Cardin et al., Histoire du Canada, 208.

[54] Ibid.

[55] Roy, Histoire des idéologies, 56-60.

[56] Cardin et al., Histoire du Canada, 209.

[57] Ibid., 209.

supported the idea that the Church was to be the dominant institution in society and associated religion with their brand of French Canadian nationalism.[58]

Another group of Catholics in Québec, the one to which Marie Gérin-Lajoie belonged, was associated with the movement of "action sociale", and although they disapproved of the effects of industrialization and urbanization, they did not reject these socio-economic changes. They adhered to the principles put forward in *Rerum Novarum* and defended the place of the Church in the modern world, arguing that Catholics had a duty to adapt to these transformations by giving them a Christian meaning.[59] Like Marie Gérin-Lajoie, they imported ideas from French Social Catholics and like them, were active in the areas of working class struggles and social reform. This "social action" movement was developed in Québec's two main urban centres; in Québec City, Mgr Bégin and Mgr Roy both spearheaded the creation of male youth organizations and of press organs.[60] In Montreal, the Jesuits took inspiration from of *Rerum Novarum*'s instructions, and developed organizations based on the models developed by French Social Catholics.[61]

Feminism

Marie Gérin-Lajoie added another dimension to the movement of "action sociale" by directing her social action toward women, who were also increasingly numerous on the job market. In 1891, 13.4% of Québec's workforce was made up of women. Ten years later, they made up 15.1% of the workforce. [62] Her concern for what she perceived as the degradation of morality as a result of socio-economic problems prompted her not only to seek a philosophy of social action, but to develop a feminist outlook as well. While her concern for the hardships of working class women inspired her interest in Social

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[58] Ibid., 210.

[59] Ibid.

[60] Jean Hamelin and Nicole Gagnon, Histoire du Catholicisme québécois, Tome 1, Le XXe siècle (1898-1940) (Montréal 1984), 190-197.

[61] Ibid., 219-231.

[62] Le Collectif Clio (Micheline Dumont, Michèle Jean, Marie Lavigne and Jennifer Stoddart), Histoire des femmes au Québec depuis quatre siècles (Québec 1992), 211.

Catholicism, she was receptive also to ideas that dealt with bourgeois women's moral responsibility towards these women of the working class. This moral responsibility entailed that bourgeois women play an active part in the Social Catholic movement, and was therefore a source of her feminism.

She argued that women were unique, different from men in their capacity to bear children and nurture them. Motherhood was central to their identity, and the "talents" that were associated with this uniquely female characteristic made them particularly apt at contributing to the betterment of society. As *women,* they had a role to play in the public sphere by instilling in it the moral fabric it was lacking. Like the leaders of France's largest Catholic women's group, the *Ligue Patriotique des Françaises*, with whom she had close ties, Marie Gérin-Lajoie insisted that women were key to restoring the social order.

This Christian feminism--for there was more than one brand of feminism--was in fact the most popular at the turn of the century in both France and Canada. However, such a discourse on the role of women was not always considered feminist among scholars. To define Marie Gérin-Lajoie as a feminist in her own time is possible today because of relatively recent scholarship that has re-examined the definition of feminism, taking into account not only today's standards, but those of the historical context as well.

Initially, historians of women defined feminism as the defense of equal rights for men and women, and defined as feminists those who fought for such rights.[63] In France, this type of feminism developed in the context of the Revolution, after women were deprived of a number of political rights; they were excluded from the rights of citizenship, they were denied the freedom of speech and assembly, and their literary clubs were closed. Women such as Olympe de Gouges, Etta Palm, Claire Lacombe, and Pauline Léon protested against these measures and claimed equal rights for women. Despite their tragic fates (Olympe de Gouge was guillotined, Etta Palm fled into exile, while Claire Lacombe

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[63] Karen Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," in Beyond Equality and Difference. Citizenship, Feminist Politics and Female Subjectivity, Gisela Bock and Susan James (eds.), (London and New York 1992), 70.

and Pauline Léon were arrested) their work nevertheless launched a tradition of militant feminism and in this sense, was a predecessor of the French suffrage movement, led by Hubertine Auclert, founder of the first enduring women's suffrage league.[64] However, this militant brand of feminism did not succeed in mobilizing a large number of women.[65]

The majority of French women were reluctant to embrace suffragism and were more interested in making their contribution to public life through charity work.[66] Their work did not immediately attract the attention of feminist historians because of its apparent anti-feminist tone. (They insisted on women's uniqueness, and argued that women's role in the public realm was necessarily different than that of men, given their maternal and nurturing characteristics.)[67] By examining how these women saw themselves, however, (for many of them considered themselves to be feminists), historians broadened their definition of feminism and included categories that could account for this type of outlook.[68] These women--the majority of whom were Catholic such as the Vicomtesse de Vélard, Jeanne Chenu, Mercédès Le Fer de la Motte, Lucie Félix-Faure, to name a few--were motivated first and foremost by their desire to rechristianize France given the anti-clerical offensive. They were concerned by the social conditions of the working class and therefore, relied on *Rerum Novarum* to justify their work.[69]

They have been referred to as right-wing, Christian feminists, and more recently, as relational feminists, the latter term referring specifically to their mode of argumentation when calling for women's rights. Historian Karen Offen, who introduced the term, explains that relational feminists argued for rights based on women's difference in relation to men, and defined their uniqueness by emphasizing their capacity for motherhood.[70] In

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[64] Steven C Hause and Anne R. Kenney, Women's Suffrage and Social Politics in the French Third Republic (Princeton University Press 1984), 9.

[65] Ibid., 10.

[66] Ibid., 58.

[67] Offen, "Defining Feminism," 70-71.

[68] Ibid., 71.

[69] Hause, Women's Suffrage and Social Politics, 58.

[70] Offen, "Defining Feminism," 76. Karen Offen specifies that relational feminism

other words, "relational feminism combined a case for moral equality of women and men with an explicit acknowledgment of differences in women's and men's sexual function in society."[71] The struggle for the recognition of women's contribution to public life could therefore be fought without abandoning this idea that women were different from men. Marie Gérin-Lajoie adhered to this particular view, and can therefore be labeled a Christian feminist.

The development of her feminist thought was shaped, however, not only by her ties to French women, but by her mother as well. Marie Lacoste was involved in the feminist movement on many fronts. She began her work as a feminist first among anglophone Canadians. Her fight for the reform of women's working conditions and for women's rights was done, initially, on behalf of Montreal's chapter of the National Council of Women. The NCW, founded in 1893 by the Governor General's wife, Lady Aberdeen,[72] was an umbrella group of representatives from a variety of women's organizations. Prior to its foundation, a number of women's groups had begun paving the way for the women's movement in English Canada, including missionary societies such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union and the Young Women's Christian Association, and political lobby groups such as the Toronto Women's Literary Club and the Canadian Women's Suffrage Association.[73] The goal of the NCW, to extend women's domestic identity into the public realm,[74] corresponded with Marie Lacoste's vision of women's role. However, its decision to avoid affiliation with any denomination eventually cost the NCW the support not only of Christian women's groups, such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union,[75] but of its French Canadian and Catholic members as well.

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can apply not only to Catholic women, but to a number of women who sought suffrage, including Radical and Socialist women in France.

[71] Ibid., 77.

[72] Le collectif Clio, Histoire des femmes au Québec, 343.

[73] Alison Prentice, Paula Bourne, Gail Cuthbert Brandt, Beth Light, Wendy Mitchinson, Naomi Black, Canadian Women, A History (Toronto 1988), 172-177.

[74] Ibid., 180.

[75] Ibid., 181.

It was the absence of a Catholic philosophy that led Marie Lacoste to found the *Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste* , allowing her to combine more easily her Catholicism with her feminism.[76] Although she justified women's rights on the basis of their difference (like most Christian feminists in France), she nevertheless spoke in terms reminiscent of the more militant strand of feminism, arguing for women's suffrage and describing marriage as women's legal death.[77] Throughout her career, she would lobby the government for a reform of the Civil Code to improve married women's legal status and for women's right to vote. But she would fight these battles by adopting a mode of argumentation based on the values of the Church--for example, she would justify women's right to vote by arguing that their "moral" influence would benefit society, hence combining aspects of both left and moderate feminism.

Her daughter also adhered to the Christian view of feminism, and in so doing, embraced an element of modernity, that is to say the idea that women had a place in the public world. However, at the same time, she remained suspicious of modernity's fascination with secularization given the events unfolding in France, and the signs that this was happening in Québec. Her ambivalent feelings toward modernity led her towards the Social Catholic movement, which provided her with an alternative to a secular social order, without forcing her to abandon elements of the modern project that she liked, such as feminism.

Her struggle, therefore, was to combine modernity, religion and feminism in a coherent social vision. Not only was this an intellectual challenge, but Marie Gérin-Lajoie also had to decide in what environment she would develop her Social Catholic project. In 1961, looking back on these early years, she said: "I did not know if [my project of social apostleship] would be practised in the secular world, or if it would be practised within a religious congregation. It took a long time to ripen."[78] She was torn between a longing to

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[76] Le collectif Clio, Histoire des femmes au Québec, 347.

[77] Ibid., 348.

[78] AINDBC, Marie Gérin-Lajoie, Conference presented to a group of novices on

follow through with what she felt was her religious vocation and her mother's distress at the idea that her daughter would take the veil. Marie Lacoste had had an unpleasant experience as a student in a Catholic boarding school, and according to her daughter, she expressed her distaste for religious life by actively attempting to steer Marie Gérin-Lajoie away from it.[79] For example, when, as an adolescent, Marie Gérin-Lajoie wanted to follow a closed retreat in the hope of discovering her true calling in life, Marie Lacoste forbade her from doing so in a convent where she would be "subject to the nuns' influence."[80] Instead, Marie Gérin-Lajoie spent her retreat in her bedroom. Again, looking back, she stated in 1961: "During my youth...my family never spoke to me of religious vocations, never."[81]

This struggle between her desire for a religous life and her mother's active resistance to it was all the more intense in that it was played out as an issue of class: Marie Gérin-Lajoie had to choose between belonging to or breaking away from the bourgeoisie. In trying to keep her daughter within bourgeois circles, Marie Lacoste insisted that she attend all the social events related to her "coming out" in 1911, obligations that kept Marie Gérin-Lajoie very busy for a total of five years. She later described this period as a "whirlwind", having to go out every other evening, in the afternoons, and of not having the time to devote to her readings on Social Catholicism, or to her activities within her study circle, including visits to working class families.[82] In 1916, she obtained permission from her parents to abandon these social activities, thus allowing her to devote all of her time to her project. She acknowledged, later in life, that these years of "coming out" had "delayed

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the foundation of the *Institut Notre-Dame du Bon-Conseil*, November 1961, (Audio cassette): "Je ne savais pas si ce serait une vocation dans le monde comme laïques, ou bien si ce serait une vocation dans un groupement religieux. Ca pris assez de temps à mûrir."

[79] Ibid.

[80] Ibid. Marie Gérin-Lajoie recalls her mother saying: "Tu n'es pas pour aller te faire influencer dans un couvent comme ça."

[81] Ibid.: "Pendant ma jeunesse...on ne m'a jamais parlé de vocation religieuse dans la famille, jamais."

[82] Ibid.

the serious setting in motion"[83] of her project because she had had no freedom. In other words, she considered the bourgeois life as a hindrance to her work. Given this, as well as her spiritual devotions, it is not surprising that she would choose to combine social action and feminism within the institutional structure of a congregation.

To do so, however, she first needed to strengthen her vision. She therefore began building contacts with those intellectuals and feminists who shared her concerns. Such a network of links to French Social Catholicism and to French Christian feminism would allow her to select ideas that would further her cause.

[83] Ibid.: "Ça retardé, je dirais, le commencement sérieux de ça, je n'étais pas libre."

Chapter Two

Building a Network in the 1910s

For Marie Gérin-Lajoie, Social Catholicism provided some answers to her struggle with the contradictions of modernity and spirituality. She therefore developed a strategy that would establish contacts between herself and this intellectual movement. She did not, however, absorb Social Catholicism passively. Her "reading" transformed ideas on Social Catholicism, building from outside influences such as her mother, her religion and societal norms. As such, Marie Gérin-Lajoie brought a unique interpretation to the meaning of the information she obtained. Her faith and her gender, in particular, played an important part in structuring her thought and eventually, her projects.

The analysis offered here of Marie Gérin-Lajoie's interpretive activity is consistent with readership theory, which focuses on the interaction between reader and text. In this case, Marie Gérin-Lajoie's educational background and interest in Social Catholicism led her to undertake her readings for the purpose of using the information to further her cause. Feminist author Patrocinio Schweickart has demonstrated that the meaning given to texts by women readers is "regulated (explicitly or implicitly) by the canons of acceptability that govern the interpretive community."[1] Marie Gérin-Lajoie's interpretive community was comprised of a number of converging discourses, including the discourses of Christianity, patriarchy, liberalism and feminism. She was the focal point of this inter-discursive framework, and the texts, by circulating through her, were re-oriented when she eventually expressed them in her own way.

Her experience as a woman, for example, affected her reading process and influenced her understanding of the texts, since, as psychologists Mary Crawford and Roger Chaffin state, "gender and gender-typing are among the most powerful influences

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[1] Patrocinio P Schweickart, "Reading Ourselves: Toward a Feminist Theory of Reading," in Gender and Reading, Essays on Readers, Texts, and Contents, eds. Elizabeth A. Flynn and Patrocinio P. Schweickart (Baltimore 1986), 50.

channeling the experiences of individuals."[2] In other words, Marie Gérin-Lajoie occupied a subject position defined by her experience as a woman which made her construct meaning from a text in a gender-specific fashion.

Apart from the social "norms" that regulated women's identities in early twentieth century Québec, one must not overlook the fact that Marie Gérin-Lajoie's interpretive community[3] also included her mother, who spent her life questioning the role of women in French Canadian society, and dedicated herself to helping women obtain the right to vote and the right to a higher education. The "canon of acceptability" in regard to gender was, in Marie Gérin-Lajoie's case, more flexible than the social norm allowed. In other words, the influence that Marie Lacoste had on her daughter made it appropriate and reasonable for Marie Gérin-Lajoie to select information from the texts that would justify expanding women's identity into the public sphere by providing them with a higher education.

That Marie Gérin-Lajoie grew up in a bourgeois environment is also significant in the development of her experience as a "reader". Not only did her social status allow her to enter a prestigious college for young women, the *École d'enseignement supérieur*, but she was also able to draw on her mother's experience and resources throughout her intellectual development. As a respected member of Montréal's bourgeoisie, Marie Lacoste raised her daughter in a social environment that contributed in shaping Marie Gérin-Lajoie's outlook on different matters. Her interactions with her mother and her mother's feminist friends, for instance, had to have had an impact on her own understanding of feminism; when she spoke of the "relèvement féminin", she referred to the improvement of *bourgeois* women's status. The higher education she insisted should be offered to women was meant for those who had time for leisure and who could, therefore, put this education to use in social organizations. Her action regarding working class women was restricted to helping them

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[2] Mary Crawford and Roger Chaffin, "The Reader's Construction of Meaning: Cognitive Research on Gender and Comprehension," in Gender and Reading, eds. Flynn et al., 14.

[3] The term "interpretive community" in this context is borrowed from Stanley Fish, referred to in Patrocinio P. Schweickart's article, "Reading Ourselves," 50.

cope with poverty. Her version of feminism, then, was understandably shaped by her membership to the bourgeoisie.

Moreover, the education and experiences that she benefitted from as a result of belonging to an important bourgeois family and of her mother's influence also had an impact on her relationship to her women peers. Marie Gérin-Lajoie was not simply a member of the female bourgeoisie in Montréal's French Canadian circles, she was a leader among bourgeois women. She developed her leadership skills early on in life, in particular during her years as a student at the *École d'enseignement supérieur*, where she spearheaded the creation of Québec's first study circle for women. Throughout her life, in fact, Marie Gérin-Lajoie took it upon herself to initiate activities that were to lead to her ultimate goal. For example, she organized summer vacations where she could unite her circle of friends, hoping that this time spent in the country would be a sort of preparation for living life as a religious community. And even though her friends supported her ideas and projects by participating in the study circle and spending the summer with her, Marie Gérin-Lajoie was the one who imagined her future congregation and the role that it would play in society, and then drafted the necessary proposals that needed to be presented to the Catholic clergy. She was, in short the dominant figure among her female peers.

Despite the fact that she occupied a position of power among women of the bourgeoisie, and despite her mother's progressive influence in terms of bourgeois women's role in society, one must not underestimate the influence of the androcentric nature of her larger interpretive community--an environment where the system of values is defined by men, and where women are expected to adapt to male points of view--which was, as Schweikart has argued, "deeply etched in the strategies and modes of thought that have been introjected by all readers."[4] As a member of a predominantly androcentric society, one might expect that Marie Gérin-Lajoie would identify with the patriarchal discourse present in the texts. Moreover, this patriarchal discourse was imbedded in

[4] Ibid., 50.

religious rhetoric. Given her faith in and devotion to the Catholic Church, the "canon of acceptability" in this case contributed to making her less critical of many aspects of women's role as they were defined by men.

The tension between her mother's progressive influence and that of the patriarchal discourse illustrates the nature of the struggles that Marie Gérin-Lajoie had to deal with. In her attempt to come to terms with this "collision" of modernity's secularism and her spirituality, she would endeavor to modernize religion.

An Outline of Marie Gérin-Lajoie's network

Before examining her thought or her projects, it is necessary to establish the nature of her network. This chapter will shed some light on her ties to different aspects of the Social Catholic movement and therefore, help understand the sources of her vision.

She set out to learn about Social Catholicism's spiritual philosophy, its methods of social action, its institutions, its feminine strand, by creating ties with the principal institutions and individuals involved. Her goal was to gather information that would allow her to elaborate her own view as to the role of spirituality in a modern world. This meant cultivating ties with people beyond the borders of Québec; it meant being receptive to foreign ideas, and examining the problems of Québec society in light of social and intellectual developments from abroad.

Contrary to what traditional historiography has argued about French Canadians reacting to modernity by closing in on themselves and resisting change, Marie Gérin-Lajoie developed a strategy that would allow her to seek answers to the complexities of modernity by examining how other societies, in this case France, dealt with similar problems. Her strategy was to surround herself with several "bridges" that would give her access to the latest developments within Social Catholicism, and feed her drive to learn. She would use them all simultaneously in order to master Social Catholicism, feminism and the social

question in such a way as to elaborate an alternative social model to modernity's secular project.

She built her network of bridges from local resources that were at her immediate disposal in the 1910s. In 1911, after completing her Bachelor of Arts degree, she had more time to devote to her own readings, and immediately began spending her free time getting better acquainted with the literature of Social Catholicism,[5] and staying informed of its latest developments, through the publications of the movement's principal institution, the *Semaine sociale de France*. This placed her in the nucleus of Social Catholic developments. From this literature, she extracted information that would be of use to her in her future plans. This is evident from the notes she wrote on her various readings.

She also tested the knowledge she gained from her readings by corresponding with other Catholic women who shared her concerns. She did so on behalf of the *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste*, which gave her the credentials to enter the Social Catholic movement, and more particularly, the female strand of this movement, on a scale that exceeded the limits of her immediate surroundings, that is to say, Québec. Membership in the *Fédération*, which was part of an international umbrella group, allowed Marie Gérin-Lajoie to be included in the activities of the French Catholic women's network. As director of the *Fédération*'s press organ--she occupied this position from 1913 until the foundation of her *Institut* in 1923--Marie Gérin-Lajoie could also inform her audience about ideas from abroad, hence including her readers in the "discussions".

She also built close ties with a local group that gave her an indirect access to French Social Catholics. The Montreal Jesuits maintained active relationships with the men associated with the *Semaine sociale de France*. Because of her interests and the nature of her work, Marie Gérin-Lajoie was included in this network and could therefore benefit

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[5] AINDBC, Marie Gérin-Lajoie, Conference presented to a group of novices on the foundation of the *Institut Notre-Dame du Bon-Conseil*, November 1961, (Audio cassette).

from the resources made available by it, such as attending conferences presented by French Social Catholics who came to Montreal at the invitation of Montreal's Jesuits.

Finally, the most direct bridge was her trip to Europe in 1913, during which she met face to face with a number of Social Catholic women and men and witnessed first hand how their organizations functioned. She returned home with documentation from the different organizations she visited, including that of the *Ligue patriotique des Françaises* and the *Oeuvres du Moulin Vert*

Each of these four bridges will be examined in turn in the following pages. But first, the importance of her mother's influence must be underlined. Marie Lacoste provided her daughter first and foremost with the intellectual tools[6] that allowed her to become familiar with French authors and to communicate effectively with French Catholic bourgeois women. Later in life, Marie Gérin-Lajoie would recognize that her mother "saw the necessity of education in order to have influence, in order to be capable of expressing oneself..."[7] Secondly, by founding the *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste* and its journal, La Bonne Parole, Marie Lacoste endowed her daughter with an institutional structure whose status on the international scene gave her the opportunity to cultivate relations with French associations. Moreover, Marie Lacoste had herself been in regular correspondence with French Catholic bourgeois women for some time. These contacts later proved useful for her daughter when she left for Europe. In a letter she wrote home to her mother, Marie Gérin-Lajoie mentioned this: "I have a whole list of people to see. I'll remember to ask about the organizations you mentioned."[8] It was also because of the *Fédération*'s mission and status that the Montreal Jesuits chose to participate in its

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[6] Marie Gérin-Lajoie was the first French Canadian woman to receive a Bachelor of Arts from the *École d'enseignement supérieur*. She went on to receive the highest marks in the provincial exams, but the Université Laval kept this information secret for a number of years. In 1918, she attended Columbia University in New York to further her knowledge of social work.

[7] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, Conference presented to a group of novices, 1961.

[8] AINDBC, Letter from Marie Gérin-Lajoie to her mother, August 10, 1913: "J'ai toute une liste de personnes à voir la semaine prochaine. Je penserai à m'informer des oeuvres dont tu me parles."

activities, and invited its directors, namely the two Gérin-Lajoie women, to participate in theirs. Later in life, Marie Gérin-Lajoie would attend the celebrations of the *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste*'s fiftieth anniversary, and on this occasion, she would reflect upon the indispensable role that the *Fédération* and her mother played in the realization of her project: "she was, without knowing it, the source of our vocation as nuns dedicated to the practice of social apostleship."[9]

The elaboration of her social vision, and consequently, of her congregation, was made possible, then, by the intellectual journey across the four bridges that formed her strategic network. Her understanding of the information she gathered through this network was shaped by the interaction between her personal motivations--her desire to find an alternative to secularization--and her discursive environment, several elements of which appeared contradictory (Christianity and liberalism, religion and science, feminism and patriarchy).

Marie Gérin-Lajoie's bookshelves

According to the lists at the Archives of the *Institut Notre-Dame du Bon Conseil*, Marie Lacoste's and Marie Gérin-Lajoie's bookshelves were filled with works from French Social Catholic authors. But to rely on this list in order to analyze Marie Gérin-Lajoie's thought could be misleading. To simply identify the authors on the list, describe their ideas, and conclude that Marie Gérin-Lajoie was influenced by them would not reveal which books she preferred, which ones she disliked, which authors contributed more significantly to the development of her thought.

Marie Gérin-Lajoie, however, kept log books that provide a sketch of the cognitive framework within which she developed her plan for social action. In these hand-written

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[9] AINDBC, Mère Marie Gérin-Lajoie, "Souvenirs," in La Bonne Parole: La Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste célèbre le cinquantenaire de sa fondation, 1907-1957, Son action sociale, éducative et charitable, Vol. 46 (Montréal 1956 à 1958), 26: "...elle fut, sans le savoir, à l'origine de notre vocation de religieuses vouées à l'exercice de l'apostolat social."

notes, she wrote on her readings, and copied excerpts from numerous works. The logbooks reveal which books she read as well as the manner in which they might have influenced her thought. They allow one to better grasp the structure of her thought and help understand her struggle in trying to come to terms with modernity. Moreover, when examining her later writings in light of these log books, it becomes clear that she undertook her readings with a specific goal in mind. In one of the notebooks, she clearly stated that she intended to use a number of the texts she read for her teaching. Her readings therefore served a purpose: they were a blueprint for her endeavors.

In these pages, the analysis of her readings will be restricted to the articles of the *Semaine sociale*; this "itinerant university," founded in 1904, was meant to make available, once a year, a time and place for the intellectuals of the Social Catholic movement to unite and transmit their knowledge through university-like courses.[10] Their courses were then published and their texts became guidelines for the creation of Social Catholic activities. Marie Gérin-Lajoie often referred to these authors in her publications and included them in her suggested-reading list for the young women who participated in her study circle and later, for those who enrolled in her course on social action. Moreover, Marie Gérin-Lajoie met some of the authors personally, all of which indicates a particular interest on her part for their ideas. (Chapter Three will examine the *Semaine sociale*'s texts, and their influence on Marie Gérin-Lajoie in more detail.)

While it will be impossible to conduct a detailed analysis of her other readings, an overview of key authors will indicate the wealth of sources from which Marie Gérin-Lajoie drew. The notebook in which she transcribed excerpts of her readings contains the names of more than 150 different authors, and the second notebook that she used to write her appreciation of certain readings contains thirty-nine entries as well as an insert describing the available periodicals that dealt with issues related to the social question.

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[10] A. Latreille and René Rémond, Histoire du Catholicisme en France, La période contemporaine (Paris 1962), 528.

Given the close working relationship between Marie Gérin-Lajoie and her mother at the *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste,* it is noteworthy that her mother also subscribed to a number of periodicals. The periodicals Marie Lacoste received, then, most probably ended up in Marie Gérin-Lajoie's hands, testifying to her interest in feminist issues. They included La Femme contemporaine, an international magazine of feminine issues; Le travail de la femme et de la jeune fille, a monthly publication edited by Marie-Louise Rochebillard, a French woman who was active in the Social Catholic movement. Among other things, Rochebillard elaborated professional courses for women of the working class in Paris, and founded two unions for women who worked in the services and textile industries.[11] She also edited a second monthly publication, titled L'enseignement professionel et ménager, which was also part of Marie Lacoste's collection. L'Action sociale de la femme was published by an organization of the same name whose goal was to educate women on their role in society through conferences.[12] Marie Lacoste corresponded regularly, over many years, with the president of this organization, Jeanne Chenu. Finally, she also received the Bulletin du Conseil international de la femme, and La revue du Foyer.

Among the many authors who fill Marie Gérin-Lajoie's notebooks are the key leaders of the Social Catholic movement. Those who appear most frequently include Bishop von Ketteler, one of the first Social Catholics to elaborate the intellectual foundation of the social doctrine.[13] Max Turmann, a professor of political economy at the Université de Fribourg, also appears frequently. Marie Gérin-Lajoie often referred to his book on Social Catholicism and to his other work on Catholic women's organizations. Another key figure in the development of Social Catholicism in France was Albert de Mun, whom Marie Gérin-Lajoie frequently cited. De Mun, who was himself influenced by Von Ketteler, was

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[11] Sylvie Fayet-Scribe, Associations féminines et catholicisme social: de la charité à l'action sociale, XIXe-XXe siècle (Paris 1990), 112.

[12] Ibid., 97.

[13] Adrien Dansette, Histoire religieuse de la France contemporaine, (Paris 1948) 492.

the founder of the first Catholic workers' circles in France. His circles allowed members of the bourgeoisie to meet with workers and analyze their conditions. Frédéric LePlay is another name that recurs often. He was known especially for the method of social observation that he created. His "monographs of families" were published as a series in his book, titled *Ouvriers européens.*[14] Social Catholics, including women, later adopted this method of social observation, which consisted of inferring conclusions to pre-established questions based on social observations.[15] Marie Gérin-Lajoie's uncle, Léon Gérin, was a pioneering French Canadian sociologist who had studied in Paris with Le Play. He adapted Le Play's methods to the study of French Canadian society. As such, Marie Gérin-Lajoie's insistence that LePlay's methods be part of the training of social workers could be the result of her uncle's influence, as well as of LePlay himself.

Among the many other names that figure in her notes are those of Henri Lorin, Ludovic de Contenson, Eugène Duthoit, Abbé Eugène Beaupin, Abbé Calippe, Abbé Sertillanges, and Abbé Thellier de Poncheville. All were closely associated with the *Semaine sociale de France*, one of the more durable institutions created by lay Social Catholics.

All these different sources of information, then, contributed to building the intellectual framework from within Marie Gérin-Lajoie undertook her activities. But one must go farther than simply examining the content of the texts and take into account the interaction between reader and text. Granted, the ideas presented in the texts did contribute to shaping her thought. In turn, however, the ideas she selected from her readings served to further an already established purpose. This can be seen, for instance, in the logbook entries recording her "appreciation" of Max Turmann's Initiatives féminines, and Abbé Beaupin's article, L'éducation sociale et les cercles d'études. In the logbook, she wrote

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[14] Jean-Baptiste Duroselle, Les débuts du catholicisme social en France, 1822-1870 (Paris 1951), 672.

[15] Ibid., 675.

thoughts on her readings, noting the author and title of her books or articles, accompanied by a brief summary of their thesis. Of Turmann's Initiatives féminines, she wrote:

> Appreciation: a confident doctrine inspired by the principles of Catholicism. The documentation is well thought-out and useful. Most worthy of recommendation to obtain general ideas on feminine issues and organizations.[16]

Here, Marie Gérin-Lajoie explains that the text is well-documented, useful and that she considered it worth recommending. Given her twin goals of promoting a Christian social order that welcomed a public role for women, she found in Turmann a valuable resource and authority.

Abbé Beaupin's article, published in the *Semaine sociale de France*, would also be of use to her in reaching her goals:

> Appreciation: This study is most interesting for its look at French circles, which differ from our own. However, a number of general ideas that are developed will be of use to us.[17]

Wanting to establish study circles, Marie Gérin-Lajoie read Beaupin, seeking specific insight as to how to proceed.

Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste: structure and status

As we can see, her strategy--the way she chose to make use of the text and the information she ultimately selected--played a large role in forming patterns of meaning.[18]

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[16] AINDBC, Bibliographies, P1/C,9.2 (08): "Appréciation: Doctrine sûre et d'inspiration catholique. Documentation consciencieuse et utile...A peu près ce qui a de plus recommandable pour obtenir des idées générales sur les oeuvres et questions féminines mentionnées."

[17] Ibid: "Appréciation: Cette étude trouve sa pleine appréciation dans les cercles français qui diffèrent des nôtres. Cependant plusieurs développements sur les idées générales nous seront utiles."

[18] For more on these two accounts of the reading experience, ie: reader-dominant and text-dominant, and the contribution of feminist criticism to such theories, see Patrocinio P Schweickart, "Reading Ourselves," in Gender and Reading, 31-62.

Marie Gérin-Lajoie's purpose in reading was to extract useful information. However, she did not only seek answers from the literature, but she also turned to other women who shared similar concerns: the Catholic women's organizations of France. This was a task she undertook on behalf of the *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste*.

The *Fédération* worked toward improving the lives of French Canadian women: it helped working class women by promoting unions, professional associations and other similar endeavors, and it helped bourgeois women by promoting higher education and by providing them with an opportunity to help working class women. As such, the *Fédération* served as a "laboratory" for Marie Gérin-Lajoie; it was a "space" that allowed her to put certain experiments to the test, like study circles for example. Moreover, the *Fédération*'s press organ, La Bonne Parole, provided Marie Gérin-Lajoie with a vehicle to voice her concerns about the direction society was taking and about women's place in it. Because the *Fédération* furnished her with a voice and a means to put certain ideas into practice, it therefore legitimized her participation in the international Catholic women's movement.

The first decade of the twentieth century witnessed the creation of numerous Catholic women's groups in many parts of the world. It began in 1901 with the foundation of the *Ligue Patriotique des Françaises* in France, and almost every year afterwards until 1911, another group would spring up in a different country, including Portugal, Switzerland, Germany, Uruguay, Luxembourg, Poland, England, Austria, Argentina, Spain, Brazil, the United States, and Hungary.[19]

The *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste* was founded in 1907, in the midst of this movement. Marie Lacoste, together with four other women, had decided to create an organization that responded specifically to the needs of French Canadian and Catholic women.[20] Marie Lacoste's goal was to unite French-Canadian women under a 'national' organization designed to promote social action and education among women. Upon

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[19] AINDBC, G. Ribaillier des Isles, "Les organisations nationales féminines et la ligue internationale," La Bonne Parole, vol V, Nos 2 and 3 (April 1917), 15.

[20] AINDBC, Mère Marie Gérin-Lajoie, "Souvenirs," 25.

receiving the Church's blessing,[21] the new federation attracted in 1907, an initial twenty-two organizations, ranging from charitable groups to professional associations. And as an umbrella group, the *Fédération* became its members' representative on the international scene. These international contacts had a reciprocal formative effect on the *Fédération*. This exemplifies a cosmopolitan outlook, which Marie Gérin-Lajoie would eventually adopt for her own purposes. As the *Fédération*'s longtime secretary would state in 1945: "In order to increase the influence of the Fédération, and to enrich it with new experiences, [Marie Lacoste] was never afraid of building relationships with foreign organizations."[22]

In 1911, it became affiliated with the *Union internationale des Ligues féminines catholiques*. For as long as the *Union*'s headquarters were in Paris, the *Fédération* had a representative based in this same city.[23] We see from Marie Lacoste's correspondence that she was regularly in touch with the *Union*'s presidents, as well as with numerous other organizations including the *Action sociale de la femme* and the *Ligue Patriotique des Françaises*.[24] In a letter from the *Ligue Patriotique des Françaises*, dated February 25, 1909, the *Ligue* invited the *Fédération* to send a delegate to its annual congress: "We would be most grateful it you would ask her to represent the Fédération nationale St-Jean Baptiste and speak of its activities; it would provide excellent stimulation for us!"[25] Relations were just as active between the *Fédération* and the *Action sociale de la femme*. In a letter dated

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[21] AINDBC, Georgette Lemoyne, "Madame Gérin-Lajoie et son oeuvre," La Bonne Parole: Hommage de la Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste à Madame Henri Gérin-Lajoie sa fondatrice décédée à Montréal, à l'Institut Notre-Dame du Bon-Conseil, le 1er novembre 1945, 10.

[22] Ibid., 12-13: "Afin de grandir l'influence de la Fédération et pour l'enrichir d'expériences nouvelles, [Marie Lacoste] ne craignit pas de la mettre en relation avec des oeuvres étrangères."

[23] AINDBC, Ribailler des Isles, "Les organisations nationales féminines," 15.

[24] The archive's folder containing Marie Lacoste's abundant correspondence (P2/01 à 02) show that among the 26 organizations that she corresponded with, she was in contact most frequently with the *Union internationale des Ligues catholiques féminines*, the *Action sociale de la femme*, and the *Ligue Patriotique des françaises*.

[25] AINDBC, Letter to Marie Lacoste from *Ligue Patriotique des Françaises*, dated February 25: "Vous mettriez le comble à notre reconnaissance en la chargeant d'y représenter la Fédération nationale St-Jean Baptiste et d'y parler de ses oeuvres; ce sera un excellent stimulant pour nous!"

June 23, 1919, its secretary attempted to bridge the geographical gap by proposing to Marie Lacoste "a representative whose task would be to communicate to Canadians the spirit and decisions resulting from our meetings."[26] In a letter sent to one of its members in 1922, (of which a copy was presumably sent to Marie Lacoste), the spokesperson for the *Ligue Patriotique des Françaises* wrote: "We have indeed very good relations with Montréal's Fédération Nationale St-Jean Baptiste which unites all of French Canada's Catholic women's association."[27]

Apart from Marie Lacoste's correspondence, the journal La Bonne Parole (of which Marie Gérin-Lajoie was the editor) also provides many indications that relations were quite active between the *Fédération* and its French counterparts. The journal contained a column called "Chronique internationale", which served to inform its readers of the latest developments occuring in female Catholic circles outside Québec and to allow for the publication of articles written by foreign "colleagues". La Bonne Parole also reproduced exerpts from books or articles written by French Social Catholics.

Marie Gérin-Lajoie constantly encouraged her readers to stay informed as to what was happening to Catholics, in particular to women, in France. As a Catholic woman who was feeling the threat of a modern world intent on banishing the spiritual from the public realm, her reports on the activities of French Catholic women, and her decision to publish articles from France, was a way for her to build a network of support that exceeded French Canada. She wanted to show French Canadian women that these sort of problems were happening elsewhere and that their fears were not unique. An article on national women's organizations reads:

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[26] AINDBC, Letter to Marie Lacoste from the *Action sociale de la femme*, dated June 23, 1919: "une représentante chargée de faire parvenir au Canada l'esprit et les décisions de nos réunions d'études."

[27] AINDBC, Letter to an unknown corespondent from the *Ligue Patriotique des Françaises* : "Nous sommes effectivement en très bons rapports avec la Fédération Nationale St-Jean Baptiste de Montréal, qui groupe toutes les Associations féminines Canadiennes-Françaises catholiques."

> By their attention to the needs of our times, today's women unite in order to dedicate themselves to social apostleship and to offer the Catholic Church their energy as a complement to that of the nuns for the common goal of 'restoring everything in Christ'.[28]

And in an article dealing with social problems and their possible solutions, Marie Gérin-Lajoie described the problems that women in other countries faced: the United States was the "land of divorce," in England, the agitation of the working class was shaking the foundations of industrialization, and as for France, it had been "lost" for some time already. Marie Gérin-Lajoie was therefore selecting as women's problems certain facts of which the Catholic Church took a dim view. As many feminists of her time, including of course the women of the *Ligue Patriotique des Françaises*, Marie Gérin-Lajoie saw social problems in terms of morality. The solution to these social problems, be they abroad or at home, was therefore to reinstate a moral social order. This, she thought, should be done by turning to the Church, "this possessor of eternal truths, also holds among its treasures the secrets of social peace."[29]

In an attempt to create a union between French Canadian Catholic women and those from other countries, La Bonne Parole encouraged its readership to keep a close eye on international issues, as the July issue of 1913 (the year the publication was founded) indicates:

> In the future, members of the Fédération Saint-Jean Baptiste shall devote a greater attention to international issues, given that the solution to many national problems depends on it. The exchange of newsletters between countries members of the international federation...will facilitate this task.

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[28] AINDBC, Ribailler des Isles, "Les organisations nationales féminines," 15: "Attentives aux besoins de leur époque, les femmes d'aujourd'hui se coalisent pour se vouer à l'Apostolat social et pour offrir à leur Mère la Sainte Église leurs énergies comme complément de celles de leurs soeurs religieuses dans le but commun de 'tout restaurer dans le Christ'."

[29] AINDBC, Marie Gérin-Lajoie, "Les Cercles d'études, Notre part dans la reconstruction sociale," La Bonne Parole, Vol. VI, No 10 (December 1918), 13: "dépositaire des vérités surnaturelles, [qui] possède aussi bien en ses trésors les secrets de la paix sociale."

> Our readers have no doubt noticed that La Bonne Parole had made an effort to supply them with a few excerpts from the international column.[30]

Marie Gérin-Lajoie was therefore, not only receptive to ideas from abroad, but regarded the problems of her society from an internationalist perspective. Indeed, there is something remarkable in her idea that a variety of Québec's social problems could be traced to international trends and that the solution to these problems also had an important international component.

This gives added significance to the fact that she took advantage of the *Fédération*'s reputation in order to organize meetings between French Social Catholics and her readers, whenever this was possible. In October of 1913, her editorial announced the arrival in Montreal of Father Plantier, a French priest who was an active member of the Social Catholic movement: he worked with Albert de Mun in running Catholic workers' circles, he founded the *Action catholique de la jeunesse française* in Lyon in 1885, and between 1904 and 1907 while he was superior of the Jesuits in Aix en Provence, he created study circles for young girls. He was in Montreal primarily to give courses to the Jesuits. But Marie Gérin-Lajoie, who had met him earlier during her stay in France in the summer of 1913, had made arrangements for him to speak to the members of the *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste*. In a letter she wrote to her mother she related a conversation that she had with him:

> A man by the name of abbé Plantier, who has given many well-received conferences to members of the league last year, was to come to its office last night. We were invited to meet him since he will be going to Montréal, at Mgr Bruchési's request, to give courses in sociology to the clergy and to those who are interested in such issues. We have met him: he seems

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[30] AINDBC, Marie Gérin-Lajoie, La Bonne Parole (July 1913): "À l'avenir, les membres de la Fédération Saint-Jean Baptiste porteront *une attention toujours croissante aux questions internationales, sachant bien que la solution de plus d'un problème national en dépend*. Un échange de journaux entre les pays fédérés, fourni par le service central de la fédération internationale, facilite d'ailleurs le travail. Nos lectrices ont sans doute remarqué que nous nous efforçons de leur donner dans La Bonne Parole quelques extraits de la chronique internationale..."

> particularly intent on getting women interested in these issues because, according to him, without women, nothing can be accomplished. He examined our journal with interest. He noted your address in order to meet with you because he is anxious to understand our position regarding social action and he wants to adopt the most efficient means to so some good in that area.[31]

This excerpt makes clear not only the interest that Marie Gérin-Lajoie demonstrated for French Social Catholics, but the interest that French Social Catholics, such as Father Plantier, had for the *Fédération*'s activities. The question of why French Catholics would be interested in the Québec situation could warrant a whole other thesis. It is nonetheless important to note some of the reasons here. Several relevant issues stem from the republican victory in France. First, it is clear that a number of French Social Catholics looked to Québec as a source of inspiration because the Church retained a place in society that the French Church had lost. A letter written by a French woman involved in the *Ligue Patriotique des Françaises* to Marie Lacoste in 1909 illustrates the feelings of frustration for the situation of Catholics in France and of envy and respect for the situation in Québec: "Though your activities differ from our own since you need only protect your rights whereas we must reconquer them, we think however that we could learn much from you."[32] In fashioning their own actions then, French Social Catholics thought that they could learn from the work of the *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste*.

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[31] AINDBC, Letter to Marie Lacoste from Marie Gérin-Lajoie, dated August 15, 1913: "Un abbé Plantier, qui a donné des conférences nombreuses et appréciées à la ligue l'an dernier devait aller à leur bureau le lendemain, c.a.d. hier soir. On nous a invité à le rencontrer car Mgr. Bruchési le fait venir à Montréal pour qu'il donne des cours de sociologie, au clergé en particulier et à tous ceux que ces questions peuvent intéresser. Nous l'avons rencontré: il a particulièrement à coeur, je crois, d'intéresser les femmes à ces questions, parce que sans elles, dit-il on ne peut rien faire. Il a parcouru notre journal et a paru s'y intéresser. Il a pris ton adresse afin de te rencontrer car il est anxieux de se mettre exactement au fait de la position sociale chez nous et de prendre les meilleurs moyens pour faire du bien sur ce terrain."

[32] AINDBC, Letter sent to Marie Lacoste from L. Kraffs, Ligue Patriotique des Françaises (Paris February 25, 1909): "Quoique votre action diffère de la nôtre puisque vous n'avez qu'à sauvegarder vos libertés tandis qu'il nous faut les reconquérir, nous pensons cependant que nous pourrions prendre bien des exemples sur vous."

A second key element stems from the centuries-old transnational nature of the Catholic Church. Thus, in becoming an active member of Catholic circles, one automatically would join networks well established in several parts of the world. It was and is, therefore, natural for Catholics to find solidarity across state borders. The question is not then, why would a Catholic activist seek lessons from abroad, but rather what could bring such a person not to seek lessons from Catholics elsewhere. French Jesuits, for example, travelled to Montreal at the turn of the century to help their French Canadian counterparts found organizations whose missions were to make the Church's social doctrine accessible to the general population.

The strong presence of aristocrats in the French Social Catholic movement is also likely to have enhanced not only its cross-national character, but also its regard for Québec. For, like the Catholic Church, Europe's aristocracy has a long history of making alliances across state borders; as well, again like the Catholic Church, France's aristocracy had strong reasons for looking to a non-republican Québec for signs of hope and perhaps, examples to follow. The legacy of the French Revolution, in short, made the situation in Québec seem favorable in the eyes of French Catholics, and contributed to heightening the admiration that they felt for the work of both Marie Lacoste and Marie Gérin-Lajoie.

A number of letters that Marie Gérin-Lajoie sent home while in France reveal the influence and respect surrounding Marie Lacoste and her *Fédération*, and demonstrate the prestigious nature of the contacts that her daughter inherited and was able to work in:

> ...you would be surprised if I told you that after only a few minutes of conversation, he [Father Plantier] was talking to me about your work as if he knew you. I was astonished. He says he already holds you in high regard and sends you his respects.[33]

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[33] AINDBC, Letter sent to Marie Lacoste from Marie Gérin-Lajoie, dated August 15, 1913: "...tu serais surprise si je te disais qu'après quelques mots d'entrevue à peine il [Father Plantier] me disait comme s'il te connaissait ton rôle dans les oeuvres et ton caractère, j'en étais renversée. Il dit qu'il t'a déjà en haute estime et te présente ses respects."

In another letter, Madame Froissard, the president of the *Ligue Patriotique des Françaises*, apparently expressed interest and admiration for Marie Lacoste: "Judging from the way she greeted me, and from the way she spoke of you, I assure you she holds you in high regard!"[34]

Finally, the interest demonstrated by French Social Catholics for the *Fédération* is further confirmed in a letter addressed to Marie Lacoste from a Swiss priest. In this letter, dated July 23, 1908, Father Wilfrid Lebon wrote on behalf of Max Turmann, a political economy professor at the Université de Fribourg. We learn that professor Turmann was preparing the second edition to his book on the development of Social Catholicism since *Rerum Novarum*:

> On this occasion, he asked me if I could obtain some information on the women's movement in Canada. Having often had the pleasure of hearing about your activities while I was in Canada, and since, having read what Mr. Max Turmann has said of them in his "Initiatives féminines", I thought you would be particularly well informed about this question.[35]

Marie Lacoste did indeed provide the information requested as a postcard sent by Father Lebon in November of the same year indicates: "Mr. Max Turmann asked me to thank you on his behalf for your excellent documentation."[36]

Not only, then, did the *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste* provide information to French Social Catholics, but, by bridging the distance between Québec and France, it allowed Marie Gérin-Lajoie to obtain ideas on the function and structure of Social

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[34] AINDBC, Letter sent to Marie Lacoste from Marie Gérin-Lajoie, dated August 15, 1913: "À la manière dont elle m'a reçu et dont elle m'a parlé de toi, je t'assure qu'elle t'a en grande estime!"

[35] AINDBC, Letter sent to Marie Lacoste from Father Wilfrid Lebon, dated July 23, 1908: "Il m'a demandé, à cette occasion, si je ne pourrais pas lui procurer quelques renseignements sur le mouvement féminin au Canada. Ayant eu le bonheur d'entendre souvent parler de vos oeuvres pendant que j'étais au Canada, et depuis, ayant lu ce qu'en dit Monsieur Max Turmann dans ses "Initiatives féminines", j'ai pensé Madame que vous étiez tout particulièrement bien renseignée..."

[36] AINDBC, Postcard sent to Marie Lacoste from Father Wilfrid Lebon, dated November 26, 1908: "...Monsieur Max Turmann me charge de vous remercier de votre excellente documentation.."

Catholic institutions. In February 1916 for example, Marie Gérin-Lajoie reported on an activity that French-Canadian girls held for the first time that year. This "day of study" was an event that young Catholic girls in Europe were already familiar with, and Marie Gérin-Lajoie admitted that in French Canada, they followed suit: "This is the first time that young Canadian girls are thinking of holding this type of meeting [...] But it is not simply our tendency to imitate that has led us to follow their example; we realize that the meeting of minds working toward a common goal contributes to giving them a new momentum."[37]

In February 1918, La Bonne Parole reproduced a report that had been presented to the *Ligue Patriotique des Françaises* by a French Social Catholic woman during an assembly of young women in Paris (Journée des Jeunes). Marie Gérin-Lajoie presented this report under the heading "Nos cousines de France" and wrote: "Our readers will find precious advice and encouraging examples. The duties of the young women of Canada are similar to those of young women from abroad."[38] The article stressed that the role of young Catholic women was to "search for the truth", to study the causes of social misery and to seek a way to make the future better than the past. Their duty, therefore--and they had demonstrated it during the course of the First World War--was to educate the public by transmitting to it "the principles, the ideas and the feelings that strengthen the faith and make nations great."[39]

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[37] AINDBC, Marie Gérin-Lajoie, "La Journée d'études", La Bonne Parole, Vol. III, No 12 (Février 1916), 7: "C'est la première fois que les jeunes filles canadiennes songent à tenir une réunion de ce genre [...] Mais ce n'est pas le seul penchant à l'imitation qui nous a fait suivre leur exemple; nous savons que la rencontre des volontés agissant dans le même sens contribue à leur donner une nouvelle impulsion..."

[38] Mlle Lavalette, "Les cercles d'études, Nos cousines de France", La Bonne Parole, Vol. V, No 12 (Février 1918), 11: "Les nôtres y trouveront de précieux conseils et des exemples encourageants. Les devoirs de la jeunesse féminine au Canada ont plus d'un trait de ressemblance avec ceux de la jeunesse d'outre-mer".

[39] Ibid.: "les principes, les idées et les sentiments qui font les âmes fortes et les peuples grands."

The Montreal Jesuits' Network

The ties that Marie Gérin-Lajoie and her mother had to the Social Catholic movement were not limited to their contacts with foreign women's groups. Marie Lacoste and her daughter (and therefore the *Fédération*) were both tightly intertwined in a local network that gave them access the latest developments across the Atlantic. This network was that of the Montreal Jesuits.

Within the Catholic Church in Montreal, the Jesuits were the ones to react most concretely to Pope Léon XIII's plea in the encyclical *Rerum Novarum*. Witnessing the effects of industrialization, the Pope wanted the Church to help workers by adopting a plan of social action. The Montreal Jesuits responded by spearheading the establishment of institutions geared toward this goal.[40] But they were not alone in doing so. Social Catholics from France provided encouragement and institutional models .

The *École sociale populaire* was founded in Montreal in 1911 with the encouragement of Pierre Gerlier, president of the *Association de la jeunesse catholique française*, and Charles Thellier de Poncheville, a Jesuit priest closely linked to the *Semaine sociale de France*. Both were in Montreal in 1910 to participate in the Eucharistical Conference. It was on this occasion that they encouraged the creation of the *École sociale populaire*, an organization whose "sole mission is to combat relentlessly this false attitude [the belief that morality and religion have nothing to do with political economy] by spreading, in all classes of society, the sound Catholic social doctrine."[41] It eventually became the principal centre for training Catholic militants to promote the social doctrine within their respective communities.[42] Like the *Action populaire de Reims*, it used

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[40] Jean Hamelin and Nicole Gagnon, Histoire du Catholicisme québécois, Tome 1, Le XXe siècle (1898-1940) (Montréal 1984), 219.

[41] Arthur Saint-Pierre, Questions et Oeuvres sociales de chez nous (Montréal 1914), 34: "l'*École Sociale Populaire*, qui vient de naître à Montréal, n'a pas d'autre raison d'être, ni d'autre mission que de faire à cette fausse mentalité [la croyance que la moralité et la religion n'ont rien à voir avec l'économie politique] une guerre sans merci, par la diffusion, dans toutes les classes de notre peuple, de la saine doctrine sociale catholique."

[42] Linteau et al., Histoire du Québec contemporain, 607.

pamphlets, study circles and conferences to promote the creation of social groups, to help workers form professional associations, and to push for social legislation.[43]

In 1920, the Jesuits would again copy a French Social Catholic institution: the *Semaine sociale de France*. Like their French counterpart, the *Semaine sociale du Canada* would hold annual conferences where members of the clerical and professional elite could present different themes of interest to the Social Catholic movement.[44]

Just like La Bonne Parole, the Jesuits also kept a close eye on the activities of Social Catholicism in France and kept French-Canadian Social Catholics informed. The journal of the *École sociale populaire* dedicated a fair number of its issues to French Social Catholic personalities and to their activities. The titles of the publications[45] reveal that between 1911 and 1919, 14 out of 86 issues were dedicated exclusively to French or Belgian Social Catholics. Issues 20 and 21 dealt with Frédéric Ozanam, the founder of the *Société Saint-Vincent de Paul* and of the publication *l'Ere nouvelle*. Nine issues (42-43, 71-75, 77-78) were dedicated to Albert de Mun, founder of the *Oeuvre des cercles catholiques d'ouvriers*. Another dealt with French unions (40) and two more, written by a Belgian priest, portrayed Belgium's experience with Social Catholicism.

The *École sociale populaire* and the *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste* shared a common vision. Like Social Catholics around the world, they were dedicated to Catholic social action as prescribed in *Rerum Novarum*. This meant that they espoused the view that the bourgeoisie, as a privileged class, needed to take responsibility for alleviating the hardships of the working class. In both cases, their main concerns revolved around the "social question" and the need to build a Christian social order. In an era of increasing secularization, they both favored making Christian principles the central tenets of society, and in so doing, create a context favorable to social justice. Both associations agreed that,

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[43] Saint-Pierre, Questions et Oeuvres sociales, 37.

[44] Hamelin et al, Histoire du catholicisme québécois, 228.

[45] By limiting myself to the titles of the publications, I exclude possible references to French social Catholicism that may appear in the texts.

in order to attain this "ideal", they had to educate the bourgeoisie to the plight of the workers and to the principles of social justice. As such, the two organizations had an interest in one another. The main difference between them was one of clientele: the *Fédération* was particularly concerned with the hardships of working class women and with the education of bourgeois women while the *École sociale populaire* aimed its efforts primarily at intellectuals, who were mostly male.

The Jesuits were interested in the *Fédération* because it was, to their understanding, the perfect example of the *oeuvre sociale*, or the type of organization necessary to carry out the goals of Social Catholicism, and for this, it "deserved encouragement and was worthy of all patronage."[46] To the *Fédération*, the Jesuits were an important source of information, not only because of the content of their publication, but also because of their ties with French male Social Catholics who, through their *Semaine sociale*, published some of the most current ideas on the practical application of Social Catholicism.

The activities of both the *École sociale populaire* and the *Fédération* thus became intertwined, as is revealed in their publications. For example, the fifth issue of the *École sociale populaire* was written by Marie Lacoste and dealt with the *Fédération.*[47] In 1912, the *École sociale populaire* held a conference under the patronage of the *Fédération*[48] on "necessary organizations". The following year, the issues of the *École sociale populaire* that had been dedicated to Frédéric Ozanam were reproduced in the May and June 1913 issues of La Bonne Parole. In this same June issue, La Bonne Parole published a letter written by Thellier de Poncheville, the French Jesuit priest who had encouraged the creation of the *École sociale populaire*. In 1917, Thellier de Poncheville attended the

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[46] Arthur Saint-Pierre, member of the *École sociale populaire*'s executive, wrote to this effect in an article published in the October 1909 issue of the *Messager canadien du Sacré Coeur*, another of the Jesuits' publications, 11: "Et voilà pourquoi la Fédération Nationale mérite tous les encouragements, est digne de toutes les sympathies."

[47] AINDBC, Marie (Lacoste) Gérin-Lajoie, "La fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste et ses associations professionelles," École sociale populaire, No 5, 1911.

[48] AINDBC, Valentin (Father) Breton, "Les oeuvres nécessaires," École sociale populaire, No 16, 1912.

Fédération's annual congress.[49] In December of the same year, La Bonne Parole published an excerpt of a conference given by Thellier de Poncheville during the sixth session of the *Semaine sociale de France*, held in Bordeaux in 1909. The theme was of interest to the readers of La Bonne Parole, since Thellier de Poncheville dealt with the question of women's social roles.

In December of 1915, La Bonne Parole reported on its first experience with an activity for young women called *Journée d'étude*. The article clearly portrays the ties that existed between the *Fédération*, namely, Marie Gérin-Lajoie, and the Jesuits. Marie Gérin-Lajoie presided over the entire "study day". But as an organizer, she had called upon Father E.E. Gouin, a frequent writer for the *École sociale populaire*,[50] to preside over the morning session. He, in turn, invited Father Rutten, a Belgian working priest who was secretary of the *Fédération des syndicats ouvriers chrétiens* and president of the *Fédération des cercles d'études de Belgique*,[51] to inaugurate the first *Journée d'étude*.

The *École sociale populaire* and the *Fédération* also shared an appreciation for one of the main education tools of the Social Catholic movement, that is, study circles. These seminars, devoted to transmitting the Social Catholic doctrine to young men and women became integrated in the network created by Marie Gérin-Lajoie and the Jesuits. For example, the study circle she created, called the *Cercle Notre-Dame* (the first ever for French-speaking women in Québec), was affiliated not only to the *Fédération*, but also to the *École sociale populaire*. As such, Father Gouin was its director.[52] And in 1916, when the *École sociale populaire* called on Marie Gérin-Lajoie to write the fifty-second issue of

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[49] AINDBC, Marie Gérin-Lajoie, "Chronique des oeuvres," La Bonne Parole (April 1917).

[50] E.E. Gouin was the author of 15 issues between 1911 and 1919, including those on Albert de Mun.

[51] This information is taken from nos 48-49 of the *École sociale populaire*'s publication.

[52] Marie Gérin-Lajoie, "Journée d'études: La note religieuse au cercle d'études," La Bonne Parole (April 1916).

its publication, she devoted her entire article to the benefits of study circles for the youth in Québec.

Through her ties with the *École sociale populaire* then, Marie Gérin-Lajoie not only was able to call on its members to fill some pages of La Bonne Parole, but also obtain their collaboration and support for the creation of several Social Catholic activities such as the circles and the study day. Most importantly however, the Jesuits provided Marie Gérin-Lajoie with a link to the latest ideas emanating from Social Catholic circles, ideas that she would transmit to French Canadian bourgeois women via the *Fédération* and La Bonne Parole.

Her local network of contacts, the people with whom she worked most closely, seems then to have been restricted to the Montréal Jesuits and to the women of the *Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste* . The absence of sources indicating any working relationship with her Anglo-Canadian peers regarding either the professionalization of social work or her feminist endeavors, speaks to the importance that she attributed to religion in her understanding of these issues. Despite the proximity of Anglo-Canadian women and the similarity of their concerns regarding women's place in society, their Protestantism most probably acted as a barrier between Marie Gérin-Lajoie and these potential resources. The fact that her mother had attempted to work with Anglo-Canadian women within the NCW and that she eventually broke her ties with them because their philosophy was not inspired by Catholicism indicates the importance that she attributed not only to her own religious beliefs, but to those of the women she was aiming to help.

Because of her mother's prior experience with Anglo-Canadian women, which led her to put in place an organization that responded to the needs of French Canadian Catholic women, Marie Gérin-Lajoie had no reason to seek a relationship with her Anglophone and Protestant peers. Indeed, the *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste*, the organization that acted as one of Marie Gérin-Lajoie's primary anchors, was built on a rupture with Anglo-Canadian women, and she evidently felt no need to re-establish contact. As for her desire

to seek intellectual inspiration elsewhere, her faith made it natural for her to turn to the Social Catholic movement, and in so doing, to France.

Marie Gérin-Lajoie's 1913 trip to Europe

When Marie Gérin-Lajoie left for Europe with her aunt Henriette in 1913, the trip was meant to be, from the outset, a learning opportunity and an occasion to forge contacts with Social Catholics in France. Henriette Gérin-Lajoie shared many interests with her niece; she was the director of the *École d'enseignement ménager*, and eventually provided financial support for the foundation of the *Institut Notre-Dame du Bon Conseil*, where she continued to teach as a lay woman.

Both women did take the time to be tourists during their trip; this is clear from the many postcards Marie Gérin-Lajoie sent home. However, other sources reveal that she organized her trip according to the people she wanted to meet, and that she planned on returning home with as much information as possible. Marie Gérin-Lajoie had written her itinerary in a notebook. She listed, among other things,[53] the associations and people she wanted to meet, along with their addresses. Under the heading for Paris (because the notebook also has a small section for London), forty-eight associations and schools were listed. In fact, many years later, she confessed to a group of novices that she deceived her parents somewhat by compiling this list of organizations she wanted to visit, because the trip was meant to be part of her "coming out". She explained to her audience how she had "fooled them all": "I had the addresses of secular movements, of religious movements, and I made all my visits....It was very interesting. And so I returned home with much, I would say, with much pep."[54]

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[53] Apart from the associations and people, Marie Gérin-Lajoie also noted tourist attractions and museums.

[54] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, Conference presented to a group of novices, 1961: "Mais je leur ai joué le tour....j'avais de belles adresses de mouvements laïques, d'autres religieux, tout ça, puis j'ai fait toutes mes visites....C'était très intéressant. Alors je suis revenue de ce voyage-là avec beaucoup de, je dirais de pep."

Among them, and first on her list, was the *École normale sociale*. Next to this entry, she noted to contact Mlle Novo for information. Aimée Novo, with the help of Andrée Butillard (founder of the *Union féminine civique et sociale*), founded the *École normale sociale* after trying out other Social Catholic techniques. In 1905, the two women moved into a shelter for prostitutes and planned on establishing a union for women who worked at home in their neighborhood. The *École Normale sociale*, as an apostolic association geared toward women workers, was created as a result of this project.[55] Also on her list: the *Musée social*, which served as a meeting place for the different people involved in Social Catholic activities.

L'action sociale de la femme was one of the larger women's associations in France. Marie Lacoste was in regular contact with its founder, Jeanne Chenu. This association defined itself as a crucible for ideas that were meant to be put into practice.[56] It offered its members training that would allow them to teach the working class how to deal with the challenges of their social conditions. The training was based mostly on LePlay's methods, which included the use of surveys as a means to identifying the causes of social misery.

Marie Gérin-Lajoie also wanted to visit *L'Union familiale*. It was founded by Marie Gahéry, and offered training for women who wanted to become social workers, as well as services for children and young women, such as kindergarten and vacation colonies. The *Union* described itself as the first French "settlement," based on the English experience that allowed bourgeois men and women to learn about working class problems by making them do field-work, among the workers.[57] It was affiliated with the *Société internationale pour l'Étude des questions d'assistance*, which was also on Marie Gérin-Lajoie's list. The director of the *Union*'s newsletter, Maurice Beaufreton, was also the director of the periodical belonging to the *Associations ouvirères du Moulin-Vert*. Both Maurice Beaufreton and the *Associations du Moulin-Vert* were on the list. Finally, Marie

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[55] Fayet-Scribe, Associations féminines et catholicisme social, 113.
[56] Ibid., p.24.
[57] Ibid., 129.

Gérin-Lajoie planned to meet Madame Thome, founder of *Le Foyer*, an association whose goal was to teach housekeeping to young bourgeois girls, so that they could in turn teach it to working class girls.[58]

The numerous associations and people that filled Marie Gérin-Lajoie's itinerary would offer her two things: first, they provided ideas on the structure of Social Catholic institutions. Later in life, (and as will be seen in Chapter Three) Marie Gérin-Lajoie would attempt to open her own *maison sociale* much like the *Union Familiale*, in an initial attempt to put into practice the principles of Social Catholic activity. Other associations and names on her list offered her ideas on teaching methods. The schools of social training she would later found had many similarities, in terms of structure and content, with the courses offered at the *Moulin-Vert*, for example. That Marie Gérin-Lajoie would collect information that she knew would serve her only later in life indicates that she went to Europe with a long-term plan in mind, and that she already had conceived of an institution that would further her cause.

In addition to her itinerary, the letters she wrote home to her mother also indicate that this trip was, in her mind, a learning opportunity. The language she used to describe the associations she visited and the people she met is revealing in this sense. For example, in June of 1913, she attended a Congress on the teaching of domestic science (enseignement ménager) in Gand. In a letter to her mother, she remarked on meeting many participants who were skilled debaters, noting that this was "profitable" to her; she also referred to the discussion panels as an "excellent debating school."[59]

In an undated postcard to her mother, underlining both the importance of their relationship and the spirit of her travels, she told how she wished they were together for these "intellectual explorations." She related her meeting with the directors of two schools in Fribourg and noted that their teaching was very similar to theirs. Her comparisons

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[58] Ibid., 23.

[59] AINDBC, Letter sent to Marie Lacoste from Marie Gérin-Lajoie, dated June, 1913: "une excellente école pour apprendre à discuter."

between what she saw in Europe and how things were done at home were frequent. For instance, in a letter dated August 15 1913, she compared the organizational structures of the *Ligue patriotique des Françaises* and the *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste*: "after all, their system is very similar to our own".[60] Her visit to the *Ligue* proved useful, as she explained to her mother that the president, Mlle Froissard, wished to begin a closer relationship with them and intended to speak of their activities in the *Ligue*'s newsletter.

Finally, Marie Gérin-Lajoie took advantage of her presence in France and Belgium to send a number of books and documentation home. She sent her mother documents and books from the congress in Gand, as several of her letters indicate. Also, the Archives have kept many of the brochures from the *Associations du Moulin-Vert* that she brought home to Canada.

Marie Gérin-Lajoie, who according to many historians lived in a closed and backward society, managed to weave around herself a web of links to the French Social Catholic movement. The readings she chose for herself opened a window to the ideas that shaped Social Catholicism, and supplied her with a pool of information from which she could select appropriate ideas to further her cause. The *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste* provided her with the credentials and credibility to participate in the international Catholic women's movement; the Montreal Jesuits served as a link with the members of one of the most active Social Catholic institutions, the *Semaine sociale de France*; and finally, her trip to Europe allowed her to do some fieldwork within Social Catholic circles.

That Marie Gérin-Lajoie built these "bridges", and that she manoeuvred within her web of contacts speaks to her ability at planning a strategy that would lead to her objective of securing a place for spirituality in a modern world. It is also clear from the nature of the bridges she built that she was trying to reconcile her feminism with Social Catholicism.

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[60] AINDBC, Letter sent to Marie Lacoste from Marie Gérin-Lajoie, dated August 15, 1913: "leur système après tout ressemble beaucoup au nôtre."

One may wonder whether it was realistic for her to think she could succeed, given the strong influence of men and paternalism in the Social Catholic movement, and probably more importantly, since she lived in Québec, of the Catholic Church, whose hierarchical and male structure presented a disadvantage in regard to her feminist endeavors. Her experience with the use of feminine study circles will provide an insight into this question.

Chapter Three

"...si féminisme il y a"

Marie Gérin-Lajoie and French Social Catholics agreed that the construction of a Christian social order was the only appropriate alternative to secularization in the modern world. They also agreed that women were central to attaining this ideal social order because, in their understanding, women carried enormous moral influence as mothers and wives. As a result, both Marie Gérin-Lajoie and French Social Catholics gave women an important part in building the Christian social order.

However, their opinions differed dramatically when it came to imagining the place that women would hold once their "ideal" social order was attained. Marie Gérin-Lajoie longed for an increased public role for women, whereas men of the French Social Catholic movement, in particular those associated with the *Semaine sociale de France*, insisted on the idea that women's place be restricted to the private sphere. These differing views of women's identity were expressed by Marie Gérin-Lajoie and by the men of the *Semaine sociale* in their discussions on the role of study circles.

The men of the *Semaine sociale* sought to use the circles as a means of controlling the scope of women's activities. They had been inviting bourgeois women to contribute to the propagation of the social doctrine for some time, and study circles were often proposed as an appropriate entry into the movement, since they served as training schools to prepare, or "mold" women according to their needs. They struggled, therefore, with their desire to include women in their plans of building a Christian social order and with their fear of undermining the "proper" place of women in society, hence the ambivalence that characterizes a comment made by a member of the *Semaine sociale* in 1909: "Our feminism, if there truly is such as thing..."[1]

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[1] Abbé Beaupin, "La Méthode d'action des Cercles d'étude féminins," Semaine sociale de France (Bordeaux 1909), 411: "Notre féminisme, si féminisme il y a..."

As for Marie Gérin-Lajoie, feminism clearly influenced her understanding of the female study circles. Even though she agreed with her French counterparts that the study circles were first and foremost a tool for attaining a Christian social order, she also saw the circles as a means of expanding the role of women. In fact, for a number of French women who participated in the study circles and who consequently received a broader education than they would have otherwise, the circles served as a stepping stone to more autonomous feminine activities, prompting feminist historians to make a distinction between the Social Catholic movement and the female Social Catholic movement.[2] In the same vein, Marie Gérin-Lajoie treated the circles as an educational vehicle for turning Christian bourgeois women into *professional* social workers, making them qualified to deal with social problems, and thereby opening a new door for them in Québec's public realm.

Professionalization, in fact, was a key component of Marie Gérin-Lajoie's strategy, a fact that dramatizes her differences with France's male Social Catholics. When she began her own female study circle, she suggested to the other members that they expand their activities to include, in addition to readings and discussions, the practice of social apostleship. She explained, later in life, that in addition to visiting families of the working class, the members of the circle would write reports on their observations in order to add an element of social study to their activities. This, she said, enabled them to better understand the situation of the poor and as a result, provide more efficient help. When remembering the work she undertook with her friends within the circle, Marie Gérin-Lajoie acknowledged that this was, in fact, the beginning of her more encompassing project.[3]

It is not surprising then, that she would have spent some time in New York in 1918 to attend courses in social work at Columbia University. There, she was taught theories

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[2] See Odile Sarti, The Ligue Patriotique des Françaises, 1902-1933. A Feminine Response to the Secularization of French Society (New York & London 1992); Sylvie Fayet-Scribe, Associations féminines et catholicisme social: de la charité à l'action sociale, XIXe-XXe siècle (Paris 1990).

[3] AINDBC, Marie Gérin-Lajoie, Conference presented to a group of novices on the foundation of the Institut Notre-Dame du Bon-Conseil, November 1961, (Audio cassette).

related to social work and was presented with case studies, as a letter to her parents testifies: "She [her teacher] makes us study specific cases and, on this concrete material, develops theoretical teachings..."[4] She was convinced by the effectiveness of American approaches to social problems, and expressed this opinion in the context of the course for young women that she would develop the following year:

> ...we shall see that we have nothing to fear from these so-called scientific methods and that they can, in fact, be advantageously applied here.[5]

The integration of such methods (which included the use of surveys; interviews with families, doctors, and employers; the consultation of public documents; the classification of information; and the elaboration of action plans) in the educational programme she wanted to offer women was, according to her, an acceptance of modern methods.[6]

Marie Gérin-Lajoie understood women's education to be the ideal site for the merger of the spiritual with the modern. How, then, did she come to terms with the *Semaine sociale de France*'s discourse, which was developed within a paternalistic framework that sought to subjugate women to a certain form of moral discipline? In other words, how did she select the necessary information that would help her bring spirituality and modernity together, while at the same time, improving women's situation? The following pages will examine the similarities and differences between her "reading" of female study circles and that of the *Semaine sociale* in an attempt to clarify her understanding of the relationship between modernity, religion and feminism.

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[4] AINDBC, Letter from Marie Gérin-Lajoie to her parents, July 5 1918: "Elle nous fait étudier des cas à secourir et sur cette matière très vivante greffe des enseignements théoriques..."

[5] AINDBC, P1/C,5, Marie Gérin-Lajoie, "Cours préparatoire à l'action sociale, Troisième partie: La doctrine Catholique et les oeuvres" (Montréal 1919), 71: "...nous verrons que ces méthodes soi-disant scientifiques, n'ont rien qui doivent effrayer et qu'elles pourraient avantageusement s'appliquer chez nous et être mises à point pour convenir à nos conditions canadiennes."

[6] In her course, she described these methods as "méthodes modernes de relèvement", "Cours préparatoire à l'action sociale," 70.

The idea of a Christian social order

According to both the *Semaine sociale* and Marie Gérin-Lajoie, it was in the natural order of things that society be organized on the basis of Christian principles. The *Semaine sociale* argued that this natural order had simply been displaced by ideas emerging from the Revolution of 1789, and that it now had to be reinstated in order to save the nation. At the *Semaine sociale* of 1911 in Saint-Étienne, Abbé Desgranges argued that the Church was the "mother of true civilization,"[7] an idea that Abbé Thellier de Poncheville reiterated while presenting his conference to a group of women. According to his argument, morality was inextricably linked to the social order. A disorganized society--as was the case in France according to Social Catholics--was one that lacked morality. The solution, then, was to reconstruct society in compliance with the Church's doctrine:

> The Church cannot ensure, in a normal fashion, the saving of souls without respecting the plan established by the Creator, who made them dependent on the environment where their activity takes place. The problem of their morality and of their eternal future is conditioned by this problem of the organization of the human community.[8]

He told the women in his audience that if they wished to contribute to the Social Catholic movement, they had an obligation to understand this "normal structure of society."

Marie Gérin-Lajoie also believed the Catholic Church was "the mother of all societies,"[9] and that it possessed the answers to the social turmoil: "It not only posesses the teachings of eternal life, but also of our present lives."[10] It was thus essential that the new

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[7] M. Desgranges, "Ce qu'on fait aux Semaines sociales," Semaine sociale de France (St-Étienne 1911), 512.

[8] Thellier de Poncheville, "La Préparation sociale de la Femme," Semaine sociale de France (St-Étienne 1911), 428: "L'Église ne peut assurer normalement le salut des âmes en dehors du plan établi par le Créateur qui les a faites dépendantes du milieu où s'exerce leur activité. Le problème de leur moralité et de leur avenir éternel est conditionné par ce problème de l'organisation de la communauté humaine."

[9] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "Cours préparatoire à l'action sociale," 3: "la mêre [sic] des sociétés."

[10] Ibid.: "Elle a non seulement les paroles de la vie éternelle, mais encore celles de la vie présente."

social order be imbued with spirituality; only this could garantee the regeneration of society. Like the *Semaine sociale*, she believed that other doctrines, such as liberalism, had proven that they could not sustain the social order they were proposing. Abbé Desgranges, for instance, warned his audience of the imminent threat that individualism presented to the survival of Christians: it atomized society, and this in turn undermined the family and respect for authority. The only way to save Christians, and consequently society, was to reorganize the social order by giving back to the members of society their spirituality. This, in turn, would re-establish the respect for a proper social hierarchy and for the importance of family:

> We are dying from having been disorganized by revolutionary individualism; reduced to dust that the slightest gust of wind disturbs. Our salvation is to reorganize society from the ground up, by transmitting to the consciences of the people the idea of order, the cult of authority, by re-establishing family and profession on a solid foundation.[11]

Marie Gérin-Lajoie argued that liberalism had attempted to build a solid social order, but failed because it lacked the primary ingredient, spirituality:

> A truly Christian lifestyle [...] integrates all the principles of regeneration which are but partially disseminated and imperfectly applied in doctrines that meet with temporary success.[12]

In short, liberalism failed society by banishing morality. Its principles were put to the test and, given their failure--characterized by social misery and a diminishing sense of morality among the working class, social reconstruction was inevitable. This social reconstruction involved, in both the opinion of Marie Gérin-Lajoie and of the *Semaine*

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[11] Desgranges, "Ce qu'on fait aux semaines sociales," 513: "Nous mourons d'avoir été désorganisés, réduits en une poussière qu'agite le moindre souffle de vent, par l'individualisme révolutionnaire. Le salut, c'est de réorganiser ce peuple par la base, en rendant aux consciences le sentiment de l'ordre, le culte de l'autorité, en rétablissant sur des fondements solides la famille et la profession."

[12] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, Cours préparatoire à l'action sociale, 3: "La vie chrétienne pleinement vécue [..] possède intégralement les principes régénérateurs qui ne sont disséminés que partiellement et imparfaitement appliqués dans les doctrines qui remportent des succès momentanés."

sociale, reinstating morality in the public realm, thus restoring the principles of charity. In turn: "we must once again coordinate human activities according to the laws that respect the morality that lives within us, not according to the laws of a blind solidarity."[13] She described these moral principles as charity and devotion, and maintained that the laws that governed them were provided by the Church: "Today, like in the past, the Church proves to be the mother of all societies as well as the mother of all souls."[14] It is with this argument that she began her course for young women on the Catholic social doctrine. The modern world's fundamental flaw, her argument went, was its dismissal of the spiritual, which was nonetheless indispensable since only it could provide solutions to the social question: "A truly Christian life is therefore social and offers the remedies to all of today's ills."[15] French Social Catholicism was, for Marie Gérin-Lajoie, a religious response to the ills of modernity and as such, offered her solutions that both respected the Church's doctrine, and at the same time, acknowledged the inescapable condition of modernity.

In addition to being in agreement as to the nature of the new social order, Marie Gérin-Lajoie was also attracted to Social Catholicism because it acknowledged the "immense, incomparable role of women."[16] The *Semaine sociale* proposed to transform the consciences of the French, who were heading in the wrong direction by breaking with the Christian tradition and adhering to the principles of the French Revolution's Civil Code, in other words, to materialism, to the exploitation of workers, to individualism and to an amoral society.[17] They argued that the power to transform these consciences lay with

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[13] Ibid.: "il faut de nouveau coordonner les activités humaines, non d'après les lois d'une aveugle solidarité, mais d'après les lois qui tiennent compte des facteurs moraux qui sont en nous."

[14] Ibid.: " Aujourd'hui comme autrefois elle se montre la mêre [sic] des sociétés, aussi bien que des âmes."

[15] Ibid.: "La vie chrétienne pleinement vécue, est donc véritablement sociale et comporte le remède à tous nos maux actuels."

[16] Maurice Deslandres, "De la formation pratique du sens social chez la femme," Semaines sociales de France (Bordeaux 1909), 373.

[17] Henri Lorin, (president of the Commission Générale de la Semaine Sociale), "L'orientation sociale de la Pensée catholique au XIXe siècle, Cours d'ouverture," Semaines sociales de France (Rouen 1910), 80.

women. Thellier de Poncheville summed up this idea in 1909 when he said, "she who rocks the cradle rules the world."[18] Social Catholics maintained that as a wife, a woman could influence the conscience of her husband, confirming or weakening his desire to fulfill his social obligations;[19] "She is, in her obscurity, the guiding spirit behind the social man."[20] And as a mother, the first teacher her children would encounter, she had the power to raise them to be aware of the "social question" and its solutions: "through her, souls live and consciences are formed."[21] Maurice Deslandres, a lecturer of the *Semaine sociale* , declared in 1909, that men could not undertake a social reconstruction without the collaboration of women:

> How can one work at social regeneration and not try before all else to make women enlightened and enthusiastic collaborators of this tremendous enterprise.[22]

Marie Gérin-Lajoie agreed that women possessed an exceptional moral influence and that this influence could help spread the social doctrine across society, and in particular, within their own families, which were the building blocks of society. Her reading of Social Catholicism, on this point, placed her in the mainstream of the Social Catholic interpretive community. In fact, her view of women's role was so consistent with the *Semaine sociale* that a text she wrote in the July 1914 issue of La Bonne Parole is almost identical in structure and content to that of Thellier de Poncheville, published in the *Semaine sociale de Bordeaux* in 1909. They both begin by examining specific roles of bourgeois women in the domestic sphere. The women they describe are mothers who

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[18] Thellier de Poncheville, "Le rôle social de la Femme," Semaine sociale de France (Bordeaux 1909), 353: "celle qui berce l'enfant dirige le monde."

[19] Ibid., 354.

[20] Ibid., 356: "Elle est, dans sa pénombre, le bon génie de l'homme social."

[21] Ibid.: "par elle vivent des âmes et se forment des consciences."

[22] Deslandres, "De la formation pratique du sens social chez la femme," 373: "Comment donc travailler à la regénération sociale de notre temps et ne pas chercher, avant toute chose, à faire de la femme la collaboratrice éclairée et zélée de cette nécessaire, mais formidable entreprise."

shape the moral and intellectual character of their children. They are wives, who must stay informed in order to "counsel" or "influence" their husbands. They are employers of domestic servants who must assure that their employees are treated fairly and that their working conditions are adequate. For Marie Gérin-Lajoie, the project of social reconstruction entailed that "the feminine element play a role of prime importance...because women are the builders of the family and the family is the nation."[23]

Because of this "unique, female" characteristic, the men of the *Semaine Sociale* and Marie Gérin-Lajoie both insisted that it was necessary to widen the scope of women's influence in order to reach the problematic sector of society, that is to say, the workers. To do so, bourgeois women had to enter the public sphere. This led the men of the *Semaine Sociale* to speak not simply of *la femme*, but of *la femme sociale*. And where women, according to the understanding of Social Catholics, used to be confined to the private sphere, they now had the "obligation to tear themselves from the home and bring to society at large, by their insatiable generosity, the assistance it needs."[24]

It is at this point in the argumentation that Marie Gérin-Lajoie's feminism comes into play and that she parts paths with the *Semaine sociale*. Even though she acknowledged that women were first and foremost mothers and wives, she considered their entry into the public sphere as an opportunity for their empowerment in modern society, as a chance to provide them with the intellectual tools necessary to attain more autonomy. She deemed that higher education for women would discredit male contempt: "...higher education frees women from the more or less polite intellectual contempt that they are

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[23] AINDBC, Marie-Justine Gérin-Lajoie, "Les Cercles d'études, Notre part dans la reconstruction sociale," La Bonne Parole, Vol VI, No10 (December 1918), 14: "l'élément féminin aura un rôle de toute première importance à jouer...parce que la femme est la constructrice de la famille et la famille fait la nation."

[24] Thellier de Poncheville, "Le rôle social de la femme," 367: "le droit et le devoir de s'arracher au foyer pour apporter à la grande foule du dehors le secours de son insatiable générosité."

subjected to and that often annihilates the positive influence they could have."[25] In other words, higher education could help put women in positions of resistance and power.

The men of the *Semaine sociale*, on the other hand, expressed uneasiness with the idea of giving women a larger public role. They did not attempt to create a new, public identity for women, as Marie Gérin-Lajoie would but, rather, they defined women's public role as an extension of their domestic role, hence keeping intact their conception of women's place in society. Abbé Beaupin emphasized this point at the *Semaine sociale de Bordeaux* in 1909:

> So you see, our feminism, if there truly is such a thing, does not seek, as we are sometimes wrongly accused, to substitute in society, women's action for that of men's. On the contrary, we wish to help women fulfill their roles, not to escape them.[26]

This sort of reasoning was by no means unique to Social Catholic men. Politicians of the Third Republic also recognized the social benefits of having women play a larger role in the public sphere, and began appointing inspectresses to deal with questions regarding women and children, such as nurseries, women's prisons, and hospitals.[27] However, they also recognized that their decision to designate public roles for women seemingly contradicted the notion of women's place in the home. But they were able to rationalize their actions in such a way that corresponded quite nicely with the rhetoric about women's place in the domestic sphere. As historian Linda Clark explains, traditional notions of

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[25] AINDBC, Justine Hardel, "Soyez savantes," La Bonne Parole, Vol II, No7 (September 1914), 7: "...l'enseignement supérieur...arrache la femme...au mépris intellectuel, plus ou moins poli dont elle est l'objet et qui annihile bien souvent la bonne influence qu'elle pourrait avoir."

[26] Abbé Beaupin, "La Méthode d'action des Cercles d'étude féminins," 411: "Donc, vous le voyez, notre féminisme, si féminisme il y a, ne tend nullement, comme parfois on nous en accuse bien à tort, à substituer, dans la société, l'action de la femme, à celle de l'homme. Nous voulons, bien au contraire, faire rentrer la femme dans son rôle, et non pas l'en faire sortir."

[27] Linda L. Clark, "Bringing Feminine Qualities into the Public Sphere, The Third Republic's Appointment of Women Inspectors," in Gender and the Politics of Social Reform in France 1870-1914, eds. Elinor A. Accampo, Rachel G. Fuchs and Mary Lynn Stewart (Baltimore 1995), 128-156.

gender were used to justify the designation of untraditional roles for women.[28] Women, in post-revolutionary France, were seen as *mères-éducatrices*, having inherent maternal and nurturing qualities. The argument, then, in the case of inspectresses was that:

> women's maternal inclinations would presumably benefit French schoolchildren, infants and children receiving public aid, and girls in reform institutions; women inspectors' special understanding of other women was also expected to enable them to empathize with and help women teachers, workers, prisoners, and mothers receiving public assistance better than male colleagues could. If the nation was an extended family, then inspectresses were, in a sense, state-supplied mothers and sisters.[29]

This paradox has not escaped the interest of feminist theorists, who have shown that the entry of women into the public sphere, or the definition of citizenship that was assigned to them, always revolved around the notion of motherhood, and this, not only in France, but in Great Britain and in the United States as well. Carole Pateman explains that "motherhood...exists as a central mechanism through which women have been incorporated into the modern political order," and that "they have been excluded and included on the basis of the very same capacities and attributes."[30]

It should be noted, however, that even though Social Catholics fit into the same discursive tradition as nineteenth century reformers with regard to women's attributes as mother/educator, their outlook differed somewhat in that they were not dealing with the construction of the female citizen as Carole Pateman demonstrates, but rather, with the construction of the Christian woman, hence, their constant appeal to women's sense of religious duty. Thellier de Poncheville spoke of women's quest for self-sacrifice and deeper devotion to charity.

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[28] Ibid., 131.

[29] Ibid., 136.

[30] Carole Pateman, "Equality, difference, subordination: the politics of motherhood and women's citizenship," in Beyond Equality and Difference, Citizenship, feminist politics and female subjectivity, eds. Gisela Bock and Susan James (London and New York 1992), 19.

Maurice Deslandres, also a lecturer at the *Semaine sociale* in 1909, ended his presentation by telling his audience that women's religious spirit could be renewed, and that they would begin to understand things that their limited life experiences had kept out of reach:

> Finally, a new life shall open up for your souls and for your hearts, an immense sympathy for all those who suffer shall be born within you, which will pique your interest in things that you are not even aware of, given the narrowness of your present lives.[31]

This quotation exemplifies the extent to which the men of the *Semaine sociale* attempted to restrict the development of women's public identity to that of a greater capacity for sympathy: their hearts and their souls would benefit from their new public responsibilities, but not their intellect.

Marie Gérin-Lajoie, unlike Social Catholics and French reformers, did not define women's public role as simply an extension of their maternal identity. In terms of women's place in the public sphere, she set aside their maternal identity by understanding their public responsibilities as a contribution to society in its own right--in this case, as professional social workers. That is not to say, however,that she rejected the notion of motherhood when speaking of women's responsibilities as social workers. She did indeed recognize that their public responsibilities were consistent with their domestic responsibilities. However, while Social Catholics identified motherhood as the underlying principle that defined both the domestic and public roles of women, Marie Gérin-Lajoie identified Christian virtues as the common thread between the two. According to her argument, by respecting Christian virtues in both roles, women's identity as mother and as social worker would not be in conflict with one another: "let us not believe that the activities women undertake in the home and those they assume within social organizations are

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[31] Deslandres, "De la formation pratique du sens social chez la femme," 390: "Enfin qu'une vie nouvelle s'ouvrira pour votre esprit et pour votre coeur, qu'une immense sympathie pour tous ceux qui souffrent naîtra en vous, qui vous intéressera à des choses, auxquelles dans l'étroitesse de vos vies présentes vous ne songez même pas..."

opposed to one another. On the contrary , they make each other complete."[32] She explained to her students that women could not possibly teach their children to respect the principles of the Catholic doctrine if, outside the home, these same principles were not put into practice. Their responsibility was to ensure that the children inherited a moral public atmosphere.[33]

Marie Gérin-Lajoie therefore did not share the idea that women's public involvement in the Social Catholic movement had to be limited. Contrary to the strategy of the leaders of the *Semaine sociale*, she called on bourgeois women to use their intelligence in building the new social order, as a way of attaining what she called the "relèvement féminin". She argued that bourgeois women had an obligation to use their intelligence to assure the morality of society since they were not forced to work in order to feed their families like most working class women: "it seems that the special role that falls upon those who have time for leisure is to make up for the vice and misery caused by our social system with their intelligence and charitable ingenuity."[34]

Because of their diverging opinions on the nature of women's public role, the *Semaine sociale* and Marie Gérin-Lajoie disagreed on the necessary training that would have to be provided to women. For the *Semaine sociale,* the goal of this training was not self-improvement, but strictly to serve the cause. Thellier de Poncheville reminded women of this when he told his audience that to learn for the sake of learning did not correspond to the special nature of a woman; rather, "her purpose must be to use her knowledge to serve the cause."[35] Women's training, which was to be acquired through study circles, was therefore non-negotiable because their entry into the public sphere had to be carefully

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[32] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "Cours préparatoire à l'action sociale," 15: "n'allons pas croire que l'activité qui se déploie au foyer et celle qui s'exerce dans les oeuvres soient en opposition l'une à l'autre. Bien au contraire, elles se completent [sic]."

[33] Ibid., 16.

[34] Ibid., 15: "il semble bien que ce soit le rôle spécial, dévolu aux personnes qui ont des loisirs de suppléer par leur intelligence et leur ingéniosité charitable aux vices et aux misères qui résultent de notre régime social."

[35] Thellier de Poncheville, "La Préparation sociale de la Femme," 425: "son dessein doit être de savoir pour servir."

monitored, as Maurice Deslandres informed women: "[to be enlightened collaborators], you must study. Studying is a harsh word, and can seem like a painful duty. But it is a necessity."[36] Putting women through this training would assure that gender identities would not be blurred. Social Catholic men, therefore, never hid their intention of controlling women's activities and shaping their consciences to correspond with their vision. Maurice Deslandres told them how this education would teach them to reason like a Social Catholic:

> A new conscience will awaken within you which, when you witness a certain action, will tell you: 'It is socially good, it is socially bad', that is to say in conformity or not with this justice's law which I defined when I began...[37]

And Abbé Beaupin even compared the circle to a mold, (*un creuset*), and suggested that women who did not have a serious sense of their Christian duty needed to pass through this mold in order to reshape their souls.[38] The women were told what books to read, and how these readings would progressively shape their new consciences. They had to respect the list of readings provided for them in order to avoid harmful books ("*lectures mal dirigées*"), as Abbé Beaupin called them. He then went on to recommend a number of readings, and in some cases, suggested that these readings be accompanied by the explanations of a competent person, "most often by a priest."[39] His suggested reading list was followed by an explanation of specific activities that the members of the circles should organize, for example, surveys, retreats, vacation colonies and study days. Maurice

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[36] Deslandres, "De la formation pratique du sens social chez la femme," 377: "[pour être des collaboratrices éclairées], il faut que vous étudiiez. Étudier, le mot est dur, et la chose paraît pénible. Mais c'est une nécessité."

[37] Ibid., 389: "Une nouvelle conscience s'éveillera en vous qui, en présence d'un acte quelconque vous dira: 'Il est socialement bon, il est socialement mauvais', c'est-à-dire conforme ou non à cette loi de la justice, que je définissais en commençant..."

[38] Beaupin, "La méthode d'action des Cercles d'études féminins," 420. The actual quotation is: "...il y a aussi des femmes de tous les mondes et de tous les milieux, qui auraient besoin de passer par le creuset du cercle d'études, pour se refaire une âme, parce qu'elles ont perdu peut-être, ou qu'elles n'ont jamais eu, le sens du sérieux chrétien.

[39] Ibid., 413: "le plus souvent par un prêtre."

Deslandres went even further by mapping out for his female audience the evolution of women's thought as they progressed in their readings. He told them that they would begin by reading such a book, then would feel the need to know such a thing, and so would read the next book, after which they would want to research such a subject, and so would need to read the following books and so on.[40]

The idea of using education as a vehicle to promote a certain vision of womanhood and to channel what was perceived to be the important moral influence of women on their surroundings was recognized in French society not only by the Church, but by the Republicans as well. Historian Odile Sarti quotes Jules Ferry, then minister of Public Instruction, as stating: "whoever wins a women [sic], wins everything because he first gains the child, then the husband," words that were endorsed by the Church.[41] In both cases, as Sarti notes, the goal of educating women was ultimately to restore the family as the basic unit of society: "Thus, in the name of the stability of the family and France and on account of the influence of women on customs and morality, Catholics and Republicans battled for control of women's education."[42] In other words, the minds of women were coveted by men in French society at the turn of the century, including Social Catholic men who attempted to appropriatie them by promoting participation in study circles. Such a strategy would enable them to build their ideal Christian social order.

Marie Gérin-Lajoie's conception of female study circles differed from that of her male French counterparts: for her, study circles were an opportunity for women to obtain the higher education necessary to understand the causes of the social problems at hand, and to solve them. In an article she wrote for the *École sociale populaire*'s publication, she defined the circles as "a homogeneous group of people working together in order to acquire

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[40] Deslandres, "De la formation pratique du sens social chez la femme," 378-381.
[41] Sarti, The Ligue Patriotique des Françaises, 27.
[42] Ibid.

an intellectual or social education."[43] And later, in 1961, when she reflected upon the beginnings of her work, she described the circle's activities as such: "We explored subjects that fell outside the subjects we studied in school....we talked about many things...of philosophy, of advanced science, all of this interested us...it created an atmosphere of intellectual activity that we had not experienced until then."[44]

The purpose of study circles

Despite the fact that Social Catholics imposed restrictions on the training offered to women in preparation for their new public responsibilities, they nevertheless altered the traditional notion of women's education. While most Catholic schools aimed at molding Christian mothers and wives, Social Catholics began to call for the broadening of bourgeois women's education in order to train them to be "disciples of social justice" in addition to being mothers and wives. Religious communities simply taught women such things as a rudimentary instruction, the piano, and the decorative arts. But Social Catholics realized that women could only undertake social projects if they had a solid understanding of the workplace and the lives of the workers. This sort of understanding necessitated a knowledge of economic and sociological theories. (They were particularly fond of those developed by LePlay[45]). Orléan's Bishop Dupanloup, one of the fathers of Social

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[43] AINDBC, Marie Gérin-Lajoie, "Les cercles d'études féminins," L'École sociale populaire, No 52 (Montréal 1916) 4: "Le cercle d'études est un groupe homogène de personnes travaillant en commun à acquérir une formation intellectuelle et sociale."

[44] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, Conference presented to a group of novices, 1961: Nous avions des sujets d'études en dehors des études scolaires....on causait de bien des choses...de la philosophie, des sciences beaucoup plus avancées, tout cela nous intéressait...ça faisait une atmosphère d'activités intellectuelles que nous avions pas connu."

[45] The Dictionnaire de la Sociologie explains that "LePlay proposed, as a solution to the ills of industrialization, remedies inspired by the Decalogue: restoration of the principle of authority, to which the "famille souche du Béarn" offers the paternalist model; a reminder to the elites of their responsibilities; a rejection of the Civil Code's egalitarian individualism -- in short, a doctrine far from socialism and liberalism, and from which Social Catholicism was inspired." See Raymond Boudon, Philippe Besnard, Mohamed Cherkaoui and Bernard-Pierre Lécuyer, eds. Dictionnaire de la sociologie (Paris 1993), 132.

Catholicism, recommended that women study in such subjects as classical literature, Catholic writing, philosophy, Latin, foreign languages, and the rudiments of science.[46]

The *Semaine sociale* constantly struggled with the idea that this sort of education would inevitably empower women, but that this was a necessary compromise if women were to competently fulfill their prescribed role in the construction of a Christian social order. When Abbé Beaupin said: "Our feminism, if there truly is such a thing...",[47] he acknowledged the existence of a certain form of feminism in the Social Catholic discourse, and in the same breath, he questioned its presence.

Despite the patriarchal nature of the educational programme offered to women through the French study circles, women nevertheless recognized the opportunities that the circles provided to them. Historian Odile Sarti explains that Social Catholic books and lectures, which "begged [women] to enter the public arena and broaden their horizon beyond the family,"[48] encouraged women to join the Social Catholic movement, specifically the associational movement, and furnished them with the intellectual tools that would eventually allow them to break free of ecclesiastical and male control. The creation of the *Ligue des Femmes Françaises*, the predecessor of the *Ligue Patriotique des Françaises*, is one manifestation of women's initiatives following this type of encouragement.[49]

For Marie Gérin-Lajoie, part of the appeal of study circles can also be explained by the educational opportunities they offered women, such as "readings, surveys, observations and discussions."[50] Through such practices, the participants would be incorporated as active subjects in a new interpretive community--a process similar to that

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[46] Sarti, The Ligue Patriotique des Françaises, 28.

[47] Abbé Beaupin, "La Méthode d'action des Cercles d'étude féminins," 411: "Notre féminisme, si féminisme il y a..."

[48] Sarti, The Ligue Patriotique des Françaises, 43.

[49] Ibid., 43.

[50] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "Les cercles d'études: Notre part dans la reconstruction sociale," 14: "Lectures, enquêtes, observations, discussion..."

which had produced Marie Gérin-Lajoie as a Social Catholic feminist leader, and to which she was understandably receptive.

She was the first French Canadian woman to obtain a Bachelor of Arts from the *École d'enseignement supérieur*,[51] the only French-Canadian institution that provided women with a classical education, and a centre of controversy because of the nature of the education it offered its female students. It was during her years at the *École* that she created the first study circle for women in Québec.[52] The formation of the *Cercle d'études Notre-Dame* in 1909 was Marie Gérin-Lajoie's first concrete expression of Social Catholicism. In this context, it is worth noting that the school, for the creation of which her mother had lobbied, belonged to and was managed by the *Congrégation Notre-Dame*, a religious community dedicated to teaching, and it was affiliated with the *Université Laval*. Soeur Sainte-Anne-Marie, the woman largely responsible for the founding of the school and, later, for the implementation of its educational programme, was constantly at odds with members of the clergy. She insisted on offering her students the same programme that was offered in male colleges, which meant that women would be learning such things as chemistry, physics and philosophy.[53] But high members of the clergy, including Bishop Dauth, dean of the *Université Laval*, contended that women's education be restricted to the issues of marriage and maternity.[54]

Despite this antagonism and the discrimination that would ensue, the students of the *École* nevertheless benefited from an intellectual education thanks to the efforts of Soeur Sainte-Anne-Marie. Marie Gérin-Lajoie later recognized the enormous influence that this Sister had on her, describing her as "a person of great intelligence and most of all, for a

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[51] Marta Danylewycz, Profession religieuse. Un choix pour les Québécoises, 1840-1920 (Montréal 1988), 189.

[52] There already existed a number of study circles for men in Québec. Stanislas Lortie, who worked closely with the archbishop of Québec, Mgr Bégin, founded the first one in 1905. The *Société d'économie politique et sociale* was a study circle for workers. See Jean Hamelin and Nicole Gagnon, eds. Histoire du Catholicisme québécois, Tome 1, Le XXe siècle (1898-1940) (Montréal 1984), 194.

[53] Danylewycz, Profession religieuse, 188.

[54] Ibid.

nun, a person with an extraordinary openness of mind and spirit of enterprise."[55] But the innovations that Soeur Sainte-Anne-Marie implemented in her school would come at a price: a lack of financial backing for the school and a lack of recognition for the successes of her students. In fact, the *Université Laval* would refuse for many years to recognize that Marie Gérin-Lajoie had obtained the highest marks at the provincial exams; she was at the head of the list, having surpassed all the young men who studied at the *Université*.[56]

Given this educational background which contributed to forming her as a feminist reader, Marie Gérin-Lajoie would not have envisaged these circles as a means for the moral discipline of women. However, like the men of the *Semaine sociale*, she did acknowledge the circles' usefulness for instilling in bourgeois women the spiritual principles they were lacking. She agreed with the idea that the Social Catholic project had to transmit spirituality to bourgeois women through the circles, so as to make them qualified to transmit their knowledge, or more precisely, their morality, to society in general. It is not surprising, then, that she borrowed the term "sens social"[57] from Maurice Deslandres and, like him, spoke of awakening women's instinct for the principles of Social Catholicism: "if we have women who can appreciate knowledge, mothers who know how to teach their children the matters of the soul, then the future belongs to us."[58]

In this sense, Marie Gérin-Lajoie agreed with Social Catholicism's *religious* teachings. However, her "Christian ideal" included a better place for women in the new social order than the men of the *Semaine sociale* envisaged. By turning women into professionals of social work, not only would she serve the needs of the Social Catholic movement, but she would also benefit women greatly: "...at the base of all our aspirations

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[55] AINDBC, Marie Gérin-Lajoie, Conference presented to a group of novices, 1961: "La mère Sainte-Anne-Marie...c'était une personne de grande intelligence et surtout, pour une religieuse, d'une ouverture d'esprit, un esprit d'entreprise extraordinaire."

[56] Ibid., 189.

[57] AINDBC, Justine Hardel, "Nos Jolies Feuilles d'Érables," La Bonne Parole, Vol II, No4 (June 1914), 10.

[58] Ibid., 7: "si nous avons des femmes qui apprécient le savoir, des mères qui sachent former leurs enfants aux choses de l'esprit, l'avenir est à nous."

regarding feminine improvement is higher education."[59] This is why, in addition to spiritual training, Marie Gérin-Lajoie assigned considerable importance to the teaching of "modern" methods of social work. They would ensure that female social workers would be recognized as more than just mothers extending their maternal qualities to the public realm. The influence that her stay in New York had on her thought is apparent since the Columbia University Graduate School of Social Work placed great emphasis "upon elevating the social worker to professional status, not simply by endowing him--or her--with the necessary qualifications to be a professional but ensuring that the community perceived him as one."[60]

As such, Marie Gérin-Lajoie encouraged women to acquire some knowledge of other disciplines such as medicine, psychology, law and economics. This, she said, would allow women to act as informed intermediaries between those who required social assistance and those who provided medical and legal services. Given her vision for the "relèvement féminin", it could be expected that this strategy was meant to give women autonomy and power in their role as social worker:

> It is obviously not a matter of us replacing doctors, philosophers, sociologists or lawyers, but it is appropriate for us to be intelligent intermediaries between them.[61]

However, professionalization, this "modern" component that she insisted should be part of women's education, was not unrelated to the spiritual component. Her argument was that modern methods of social work were logical and required one's common sense; this, for her, was inherently Catholic:

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[59] AINDBC, Hardel, "Soyez Savantes," 7:"...ce qui est à la base de toutes nos aspirations de relèvement féminin, l'instruction supérieure."

[60] Marlene Shore, The Science of Social Redemption, McGill, the Chicago School, and the Origins of Social Research in Canada (University of Toronto Press 1987), 43.

[61] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "Cours préparatoire à l'action sociale," 82: "Il ne s'agit pas évidemment pour nous de nous substituer aux médecins, aux philosophes, aux sociologues ou aux avocats, mais il convient que nous soyons entre les uns et les autres des intermédiaires intelligents."

> There is nothing more Catholic than common sense, than reason, than the Providential order. Indeed, all these factors are taken into consideration by those who practise social justice through modern methods of inquiry and analysis.[62]

Marie Gérin-Lajoie's conception of women's education was thus a manifestation of her attempt at merging modernity and spirituality. Not only did she incorporate the idea of modern methods into a Catholic mode of reasoning, as the quotation above indicates, but she justified their practical application by presenting them as a means to a spiritual end. As Christian bourgeois women became professional social workers, their competence in the public sphere would allow them to propagate the social doctrine across society, thus reinstating morality in public life.

Higher education for women was the setting within which she would combat secularization. To achieve this goal, however, she would work at developing a sense of "sisterhood" among women in Québec society. This would lead her to conceive of an institution that would unite women, provide them with a higher education, and set the stage for the construction of a social order that would at once resist modernity's tendency toward secularization and maintain modernity's receptiveness to a feminist conception of women's identity.

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[62] Ibid.: "Il n'y a rien de plus catholique que le bon sens, que la raison, que l'ordre providentiel. Or, c'est de tous ces facteurs que tiennent compte ceux qui s'adonnent à l'action sociale par les méthodes modernes d'enquête et d'approche."

Chapter Four

Sisterhood
1923

Marie Gérin-Lajoie condemned what she called the "thick wall" ("cloison étanche") between secular and religious women. Her plan was to create an institutional setting where nuns and secular women could come together to build and benefit from an educational programme that would train them to be professional social workers with a Social Catholic philosophy. By training Catholic women to deal with the social problems of the modern world, Marie Gérin-Lajoie sought to make spirituality relevant in the public sphere, thus discrediting secularization. Furthermore, she wanted to make women indispensable and autonomous in the public realm, thus furthering the feminist cause.

Her attempt at coherently uniting religion, feminism and modernity would manifest itself in 1923, within the setting of her future *Institut Notre-Dame du Bon Conseil* : a feminine religious order which would be flexible enough to unite nuns and bourgeois women, or more generally, the religious and secular worlds. By modifying religious life this way, she hoped to make it appealing, or accessible, to a society that no longer made the effort of reaching out for it. Her goal, in her own words was: "Through an intense inner life combined with a knowledge of the world and of social action, to try to put Christian truths within reach of our modern mentalities."[1] Indeed the very name "Institut", an unusual label for a religious congregation, encapsulates the originality of her goal of fusing spiritual life, scientific knowledge and social action. In this perspective, nuns, being convinced of the necessity of spirituality in everyday life, were well-equipped to help bourgeois women overcome their "fatal idleness."[2]

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[1] AINDBC, P1/D,2.1, 01, Marie Gérin-Lajoie, "La Genèse d'une vocation," emphasis added: "Par une vie intérieure intense jointe à la connaissance du monde et à l'action, s'efforcer de mettre les vérités chrétiennes à la portée de nos mentalités modernes."

[2] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "La Genèse d'une vocation."

The ideal of sisterhood and the need for a new type of congregation

Marie Gérin-Lajoie believed that the development of the spirit and the development of the intellect, what she called "vie intérieure et vie extérieure", or inner and outer lives, had to be in perfect harmony in order to be efficient.[3] Christian virtues were necessary characteristics in social workers because faith was the only element that could ensure the survival and success of the social organizations for which they worked. In the context of her course on social action, Marie Gérin-Lajoie challenged her students: "Try to find, before Christianity, the smallest trace of an organization of social charity. In vain."[4] The logical conclusion, she argued, was that the acquisition of Christian virtues was a prerequisite for social work. Without a sincere belief in these principles, what would be the motivation to dedicate oneself to social action? Moreover, a healthy spirituality multiplied the positive results of social action since the efforts of the social worker were inspired by God.[5] Therefore, "the more we develop within us this inner life, the highest principle of our organization's efficiency, the more we can expect the success of these organizations."[6]

However, this spiritual motivation had to be accompanied by technical knowledge in order for each woman to be efficient in her role. As she wrote, "the organization that is most necessary for a a community will produce only poor results if each of its directors, secretaries and active members do not know how to fulfill their roles."[7] Hence the need for social workers to be educated. Marie Gérin-Lajoie argued that the skill to conduct surveys,

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[3] AINDBC, P1/C,5, Marie Gérin-Lajoie, "Cours préparatoire à l'action sociale, Troisième partie: La doctrine Catholique et les oeuvres," (Montréal 1919), 107.

[4] Ibid., 103: "Essayons de trouver avant le Christianisme la moindre trace d'oeuvre de charité sociale? Vain effort."

[5] Ibid., 104.

[6] Ibid., 104-105: "plus nous développerons en nous cette vie intérieure, principe dernier de l'efficacité de nos oeuvres, plus nous serons en droit d'espérer le succès de ces oeuvres."

[7] Ibid., 99: "l'oeuvre la plus nécessaire à un milieu ne donnera que de piètres résultats si ses directeurs, ses secrétaires, ses membres actifs ne savent pas chacun remplir leur rôle."

compile statistics, even to take minutes during meetings required the appropriate education. She underlined the fact that European and American organizations required that their workers obtain sufficient technical preparation. In France, she said, the *Ligue Patriotique des Françaises* developed its own courses for training directors and secretaries. And American organizations demanded that their workers have diplomas in sociology.[8]

In French Canada, however, she found that this level of professionalization had not yet been developed, among secular women at any rate. Indeed, she believed that the number of secular women devoted to restoring social justice in society was greatly insufficient.[9] Feminist historians have underlined the fact that lay women dedicated to good works in the early twentieth century were few when compared to the large number of nuns.[10] Historian Marta Danylewycz adds that lay women who worked in the field of charity were often restricted to assisting the nuns and had no opportunity to occupy positions of responsibility:

> Next to religious orders which were all-powerful, dynamic and well-organized, lay francophone women saw themselves relegated to a minor role in matters of social services. Their role was one of support and the majority of them only participated in charitable activities as assistants to the nuns.[11]

Marie Gérin-Lajoie offered a structural explanation for the scarcity of secular women devoted to social justice. She argued correctly that there existed in Québec society a serious lack of opportunity to receive training in this area, as well as a lack of organized

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[8] Ibid., 101.

[9] AINDBC, P1/D.2.2, Letter from Marie Gérin-Lajoie to Mgr Gauthier, bishop of Montreal, ca 1922.

[10] Micheline Dumont, "Vocation religieuse et condition féminine," in Travailleuses et féministes. Les femmes dans la société québécoise, eds. Marie Lavigne and Yolande Pinard (Montréal 1983), 281.

[11] Marta Danylewycz, "Une nouvelle complicité: féministes et religieuses à Montréal, 1890-1925," in Travailleuses et féministes, 247: "À côté des communautés religieuses qui étaient toutes-puissantes, dynamiques et bien organisées, les laïques francophones se voyaient quand à elles attribuer une portion congrue en matière de service social. Leur rôle en était un de soutient....la majorité ne participaient aux activités charitables qu'à titre d'assistantes aux religieuses."

activities that would allow women to put their knowledge and energy to use.[12] She realized that these were conditions particular to her own society, and that she could not ignore them if her project was to succeed. She knew, then, that to appropriate ideas from abroad was not sufficient; these ideas had to be adapted to the environment in which they were imported. She was careful to point this out to her students:

> No doubt, in practice, we can acquire experience from abroad: in all areas, experience makes one wise, but this experience will tell us that, in order to be efficient and durable, social organizations must grow from native soil.[13]

She therefore took into consideration that in Québec society, a religious community had the necessary clout to empower secular women and their organizations: "experience proves that religious institutions are the most powerful supports of social organizations."[14] She had lived this sort of experience at first hand by benefiting from the classical education she received at the *École d'enseignement supérieur*, as a result of the efforts of Soeur Sainte-Anne Marie. She proposed, therefore, that a religious community use its resources to provide secular women both with training in social work and opportunities to put this training to use. If nuns were to offer secular women the necessary education, this, she argued, would attract a large number of secular women in the field of social justice, and, as a result, provide enough human resources to sustain social organizations.[15] Nuns were therefore the appropriate people to make professionals out of secular women because they themselves were already halfway there:

> And since in this province religious orders are involved in various charitable organizations are they not perfectly suited to acquire this technical training,

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[12] AINDBC, P1/D.2.3, Marie Gérin-Lajoie, "Projet de fondation présenté au R.P. Stanilas Loiseau, S.J., le 16 avril 1917," 1.

[13] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "Cours préparatoire à l'action sociale," 88: "Sans doute, en pratique on peut aller chercher l'expérience à l'étranger: dans tous les domaines, l'expérience rend sage, mais cette expérience elle-même nous dira que, pour être efficace et durable, les oeuvres doivent jaillir du sol, germer du terroir."

[14] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "Projet de fondation," 1: "l'expérience prouve que les institutions religieuses sont les plus puissants soutiens des oeuvres."

[15] Ibid.

> the usefulness of which is universally recognized? Nuns are truly professionals.[16]

In a letter she wrote to Mgr Gauthier (Mgr Bruchési's successor) in 1922, explaining the function of her proposed congregation, Marie Gérin-Lajoie insisted that the role of the women who would eventually take the veil be strictly to train secular women at professional social work, and not to direct the social organizations: "we want to provide help, and not to do it ourselves."[17] As professionals themselves, the sisters would offer their knowledge to secular women as well as the encouragement and support they needed in their endeavours. And these would be the limits of her congregation's mission:

> ...to prepare, to mold, to stimulate social workers through instruction and through example; to prepare young educated women to fulfill their role as social workers within study circles; to introduce them to social organizations, to help stimulate good will with discreet assistance and suggestive relief in the pursuit of good works...Nuns would in no way seek to take over the direction of the organizations...[18]

Certain feminist historians, such as Marta Danylewycz, argue that convents offered an alternative to marriage and motherhood in a society that considered women as nothing more than procreators. Religious life, she notes, was thus a protection against the pressure of conforming to this role: "Protected by their vocation, women have been able to pursue a career throughout their entire lives....In fact, entering the convent could well have signified overcoming the handicap of being a woman in a man's world."[19] In fact, Marie Gérin-

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[16] Ibid., 102: "Et puisque chez nous, des communautés religieuses se consacrent aux diverses oeuvres de bienfaisance, ne sont-elles pas toutes désignées pour acquérir cette formation technique, dont l'utilité est universellement admise? Les religieuses sont véritablement des professionelles."

[17] AINDBC, P1/D2.2., Letter from Marie Gérin-Lajoie to Mgr Gauthier, bishop of Montreal, ca 1922: "nous voulons surtout aider à faire et non faire par nous-mêmes."

[18] Ibid.: "..de préparer, de façonner, de stimuler les ouvrières sociales, par les leçons et par l'exemple; préparer les jeunes filles instruites à leur rôle de femmes d'oeuvres dans les cercles; les initier aux oeuvres; aider et stimuler les bonnes volontés par une aide discrète et un secours suggestif dans la conduite des oeuvres [...] Les religieuses ne chercheraient nullement à accaparer la direction des oeuvres..."

[19] Danylewycz, Profession: religieuse, 204: "Protégées par leur vocation, des femmes ont ainsi poursuivi une carrière leur vie durant...Tout compte fait, entrer au couvant a pu fort bien signifier: triompher du handicap d'être une femme dans un monde

Lajoie had admitted that she wanted to be liberated from this form of submission. She chose not to marry "to be free of all the worries of family life in order to have the liberty to dedicate oneself to good works."[20] Historian Micheline Dumont adds that religious communities, by grouping together the women who rejected the role assigned to them in the private sphere, became the terrain for the development of a feminist movement in Québec.[21]

Although religious communities did allow women to become teachers, nurses, and administrators, they nevertheless forced women to choose between secular and religious life. Marie Gérin-Lajoie's congregation would not impose this choice on the women trained by the nuns. She would offer French Canadian women the option of pursuing their intellectual development and their careers without having to sacrifice secular life. Moreover, the career she offered women went beyond the limits of the traditional identity assigned to women. The notion of woman as the nurturing mother was one that careers in teaching, nursing and charity work did not escape. But the idea of social justice, or the professionalization of social work, implied that women would assume certain new tasks, such as conducting surveys and interviews, compiling statistics, and researching public documents, after which they would analyze and interpret their results and act upon them.

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d'hommes."

[20] AINDBC, Letter from father Stanislas Loiseau, S.J. to Marie Lacoste, August 27, 1914. Quoted in "L'Action sociale de Marie Gérin-Lajoie, 1910-1925," Marcienne Proulx, Masters thesis in theology at the Université de Sherbrooke, 1975, 105: "pour y être dégagée de tous les soucis de la famille afin d'avoir la liberté de se consacrer aux oeuvres."

[21] Dumont, "Vocation religieuse et condition féminine," .279.

The First Steps

In her first proposal for the establishment of a congregation,[22] Marie Gérin-Lajoie stated that her congregation's specific objective would be to remove the "thick wall" that she believed divided nuns and secular women. The openness and flexibility of the institution she had in mind would allow both groups of women to unite their efforts toward the establishment of a Christian social order by working side by side at the development of the "oeuvres féminines" or women's social organizations. The future of secular women's organizations would be more certain if a religious institution, which could provide them with resources and credibility, was involved in their day-to-day functioning.

The argument she developed in this proposal to the Church is worth reproducing in its entirety because it describes her goal comprehensively:

> The establishment of a religious order for the spreading of a more spiritual attutide in society. It would have a particular mission to tear down the thick wall that we maintain between religious and secular life and to ensure that lay women benefit from the enlightenment of the nuns; to provide secular women's organizations with a well-informed direction; to ensure through study and the written and spoken word, the mutual adjustment of the benefits of contemplative life and of our modern mentalities in order to encourage the union of minds and of wills as a way of raising the power of Catholic influence in the world.[23]

For years Marie Gérin-Lajoie would work at convincing the Church that such an institution was necessary. Unfortunately, the hierarchy would not be easily convinced because she was proposing an unprecedented model not only in terms of its role but also of its internal

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[22] This proposal was written around 1916. The copy of the document found in the Archives is undated. However, a handwritten note by the Archivist indicates circa 1916.

[23] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "La Genèse d'une vocation,": "Établissement d'un ordre religieux pour la diffusion d'un esprit plus surnaturel dans la société. Il aurait particulièrement en vue de faire tomber la cloison étanche que l'on entretient entre la vie religieuse et la vie séculière et de faire bénéficier celle-ci des lumières de celle-là; d'assurer une direction permanente et éclairée aux oeuvres féminines laïques; d'opérer par l'étude, la parole et la plume, la mise au point des bienfaits de la vie contemplative et de nos mentalités modernes afin de faire l'unité plénière dans les intelligences et d'unifier aussi les volontés pour augmenter la puissance de l'influence catholique dans le monde."

functioning. In fact, she would eventually have to relinquish some of the more radical ideas that she put forward.

She was negotiating with a Church that was more present in Québec society at the beginning of the century than it had ever been before, and than it would ever be thereafter. While the Catholic population of Québec increased by 72% between 1901 and 1931, the clergy grew by 102%.[24] In these thirty years, the ratio of priests/brothers/sisters to the Catholic population went from one member of the clergy for 166 Catholics, to one for every 97 Catholics.[25] The female religious communities were particularly prosperous. Historian Micheline Dumont describes this period as the Golden Age of female religious communities because of their numbers and of their numerous recruits.[26] Their expansion was so intense during these years (with 20 new communities founded between 1917 and 1930[27]) that the bishops actively attempted to restrain it. The bishop of Québec City, Mgr Bégin, rejected numerous proposals, both local and from abroad, for the founding of new communities because in most cases, he felt that the qualifications of the applicants did not correspond to their fervour.[28]

Marie Gérin-Lajoie had an important element to her advantage: her community would respond to new social needs that had not yet been dealt with. The community she longed for was a combination of the two principal types of communities that existed in early twentieth century Québec, that is to say those dedicated to teaching or to nursing and charity. During the first half of the century, 80% of nuns in Québec belonged to one of these two types of congregations.[29] Of these, the teachers were the most numerous,

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[24] Jean Hamelin and Nicole Gagnon, Le XXe siècle. Tome 1, 1898-1940, in the series edited by Nive Voisine, Histoire du Catholicisme Québécois (Montréal 1984), 129.

[25] Ibid., 152.

[26] Dumont, "Vocation religieuse et condition féminine," 267.

[27] Hamelin et al., Le XXe siècle. Tome 1, 152.

[28] Ibid., 148.

[29] It should be noted that charity, for lack of a better term, refers to the establishment of hospices for the old, the disabled and the blind as well as orphanages, and that the charity work undertaken in these congregations was always secondary to nursing. In addition to the communities that specialized in teaching and nursing or charity, smaller communities were dedicated to serving the male clergy, to missionary work, or to a life of

accounting for half. They were present in elementary schools, convents and orphanages, where they educated women from all classes of society. (The education of men was the responsibility of colleges and seminaries, which fell under the responsibility of priests and brothers.)[30] From 1900 to 1970, the number of women joining the teaching communities never stopped increasing. The nursing and charity communities, however, did see a decline in their recruits from one decade to the next. Nevertheless, they still represented one third of the female religious population until the nineteen-forties.[31]

In a society where religious communities were so numerous and prosperous, the prestige attributed to them depended on their size, their resources and their clientele.[32] For example, the *Congrégation Notre-Dame* which grouped, in 1931, 2505 sisters and managed 178 schools, in addition to having opened the first college for young women, provided stiff competition for other communities. In fact, the competition surrounding the founding of many communities and the recruiting of members of existing communities was fierce, as one historian has noted, "the objective of each order seemed most often to be the expansion, at all cost, of territory and of charitable organizations..."[33]

However, certain historians argue that this competition and lack of cooperation between religious congregations created a system in which the founding of new communities was made easier, hence their multiplication before World War Two: "It remains nevertheless that the system, as it was organized, allowed for the establishment of numerous congregations that could then invent their destiny..."[34] It is this institutional

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contemplation. See Nicole Laurin, Danielle Juteau and Lorraine Duchesne, eds. À la recherche d'un monde oublié. Les communautés religieuses de femmes au Québec de 1900 à 1970 (Montréal 1991), 181.

[30] Ibid., 182.

[31] Ibid., 183.

[32] Hamelin et al., Le XXe siècle, 151.

[33] Laurin et al., À la recherche d'un monde oublié, 190: "l'objectif de chacune parraît être le plus souvent l'élargissement à tout prix du territoire et des oeuvres..."

[34] Ibid., 191: "Il demeure malgré tout que le système, tel qu'il est organisé, permet à de nombreuses communautés de voir le jour et d'inventer leur destin..."

environment that made it possible for Marie Gérin-Lajoie to achieve the creation of the *Institut Notre-Dame du Bon-Conseil.*

She had initially considered the possibility of integrating her project into the structure of one of the numerous communities already in existence, but, as she later admitted, her search was a failure since none could fit her specific needs:

> For personal reasons, I have come to wonder where I could find a religious order that will respond to the pressing need for social organizations thtais evident in all classes of society, both among bourgeois women, afflicted by a fatal idleness as well as among working class women often brutalized by overwork. I have not found any that were suited to these goals... [35]

The particular vocation she had in mind differed from that of either the teaching or nursing and charity communities in two ways. First, in terms of teaching, her goal was not to establish a congregation of nuns specialized in teaching children and young women how to read, write and do arithmetic. Rather, she wanted to train bourgeois women to become specialists in social work. Secondly, her conception of social work differed from the traditional notion of charity: the idea of providing hand-outs, or *assistance* to the poor was insufficient in a modern world because the sources of misery were no longer merely natural (such as physical disabilities, or frailty due to old age). Rather, social misery was now a result of a new social organization based on an urban and industrial model, not to mention the effect of a disappearing moral fabric from the public realm. The problem was born of modernity and therefore, required modern methods for dealing with it. Just as the Social Catholic doctrine prescribed, Marie Gérin-Lajoie emphasized the idea of prevention. Her goal was to identify the sources of misery in society by conducting surveys and interviews, and then to prevent it by putting in place associations for working women, study circles,

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[35] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "La Genèse d'une vocation,": "Pour des raisons personnelles j'en suis arrivée à me demander où je pourrais trouver un ordre religieux qui répondit aux besoins pressants d'apostolat social qui se fait sentir dans toutes les classes de la société, chez la femme du monde affligée d'une oisiveté funeste, aussi bien que chez la travailleuse abrutie souvent par le surmenage. Je n'en ai pas trouvé qui fut constituée à cette fin..."

credit unions, cooperatives, as well as legislation protecting the worker.[36] She spoke not of charity, but of social justice. This is what bourgeois women had to learn.

But she did not want to limit herself to training only those bourgeois women who had a calling for religious life. She wanted to reach all of them--including married women--in order to put their intelligence and influence to "good" use instead of having them waste these talents on un-Christian preoccupations such as luxurious entertainment that only induced a state of "spiritual paralysis."[37] Her congregation would therefore have to appeal to these secular women, and this entailed a very open and flexible model. Because her ideas were unprecedented, she could not make them fit into existing institutional structures. She wanted to do away with the strict rules of religious life that prevented an adequate interaction between nuns and secular women.

Despite the slim chances she had of being accepted within an existing religious community, she had nevertheless attempted, on more than one occasion, to convince a congregation of French origins that she had become acquainted with while in New York to accept her project. The *Auxiliatrices du Purgatoire* undertook a number of activities that seemed to correspond to her project: they united women and girls with the objective of helping the poor, they themselves visited working class families in their homes, and they established sewing circles.[38] To Marie Gérin-Lajoie's understanding, however, they had not formally defined their mission, and were therefore in a position to modify it or adapt it to her proposal.[39] She explained to the superior that the communities she was familiar with were all incapable of satisfying her needs:

> Among the female religious orders that we know about, none correspond exactly to our aspirations. Either they are totally dedicated to teaching or to

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[36] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "Cours préparatoire à l'action sociale," 37.

[37] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "Une Gerbe de Souvenirs," 2.

[38] Hélène Pelletier-Baillargeon, Marie Gérin-Lajoie. De mère en fille, la cause des femmes (Montréal 1985), 296.

[39] Excerpt from correspondence between Marie Gérin-Lajoie and the *Auxiliatrices*, in Pelletier-Baillargeon, Marie Gérin-Lajoie. De mère en fille, 298.

charity, or again, to the cloistered life or to other demands that,as you can see, do not correspond with our understanding of social action.[40]

She acknowledged, in her correspondence with the *Auxiliatrices*, the obstacles to her proposal, given that a number of nuns would have to obtain a higher education, and that this entailed giving them special privileges such as enrolling in the required courses, reading certain books and writing papers.[41] However, she expressed her hope that such obstacles would not lead the *Auxiliatrices* to turn down a project that she deemed gratifying. But the very fact that she recognized the inevitability of obstacles speaks to the originality of her ideas. The *Auxiliatrices* declined to embark on her project, encouraging her to found a new community.[42]

She proceeded to elaborate a second proposal that she eventually presented to the bishop of Montréal. This second document illustrates the extent to which her reaction to secularization differed from that of other sections of the Church. The Church was preoccupied with its visibility--or lack of it--in the new urban and industrial society. Faced with a growing urban population, whose interests did not necessarily correspond with those imposed by Christian tradition,[43] the Church in Québec decided to multiply at an impressive rate its urban parishes as a way of assuring its jurisdiction and authority over Catholics. Between 1898 and 1931, the number of parishes in Québec went from 736 to 1182.[44] Even though this can be seen as a defensive expansion, it was in sharp contrast to

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[40] Ibid.: "Parmi les communautés de femmes que nous connaissons, aucune ne répond exactement à nos aspirations. Les unes sont tout à l'enseignement ou aux oeuvres de charité corporelle ou bien soumises aux exigences de la clôture ou à d'autres exigences qui ne conviennent pas comme vous voyez à l'action telle que nous l'entendons."

[41] Ibid.

[42] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "Une Gerbe de souvenirs," 4.

[43] In Histoire du Québec contemporain, Tome II: Le Québec depuis 1930, eds. Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher, Jean-Claude Robert and François Ricard. (Montréal 1989), the authors speak of a certain disaffection towards religion during the 1920s in Québec. In an attempt to combat this disaffection, the Church, in addition to multiplying its urban parishes, also started making use of the radio, creating a "Catholic Hour" on the waves of CKAC. 97.

[44] Paul-André Linteau, René Durocher and Jean-Claude Robert, eds. Histoire du Québec contemporain, Tome 1: De la Confédération à la crise (1867-1929), (Montréal 1989), 606.

the situation of the French Church, which was trying to cope with the consequences of the 1905 separation of Church and State. Part of the Québec Church's strategy was thus to amplify as much as possible the presence of religious symbols in an increasingly secular society. Marie Gérin-Lajoie's strategy, on the contrary, was to decrease the presence of such symbols as a way of making spirituality more appealing to "modern mentalities".

She spoke of "reducing religious life to its essential elements and of freeing it of everything that uselessly harms it in our day."[45] Marie Gérin-Lajoie did not explain in her text why she feels religious symbols did more harm than good. However, it could be that she felt that religious symbols alienated the members of an increasingly secular society; this would be consistent with her contention that a "wall" existed between religious and secular women. To reach the disaffected members of her society, to bring them back to the Church, it was necessary to downplay rituals and symbols. This was a compromise with secularization.

In the proposal she presented to the Bishop of Montréal, Mgr Bruchési, in 1917, she suggested, for instance, that the nuns abandon the traditional habit, and that they be referred to as "mademoiselle" rather than "sister" in public.[46] She explained that the wearing of the habit would add an unnecessary barrier between nuns and secular women, and would possibly be a constraint in their activities within social organizations.[47] In addition to rejecting the traditional religious costume, she sought to downplay the use of religious symbols even further by suggesting that the nuns wear aluminum rings (instead of silver or gold) and that their crucifix be sufficiently small so as to allow it to be hidden if necessary.[48] The ring and the crucifix, as invisible as she attempted to make them, would nevertheless be the "distinctive marks of the order."[49]

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[45] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "La Genèse d'une vocation": "réduire la vie religieuse à ce qu'il y a d'essentiel et la dégager de tout ce qui lui nuit inutilement à notre époque."

[46] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "Projet de fondation," 2 and 8.

[47] Ibid., 2.

[48] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "La Genèse d'une vocation".

[49] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "Projet de fondation," 8: "les marques distinctives de la communauté."

The impact that such innovative suggestions could have on the Church is exemplified by the reaction of Marie Gérin-Lajoie's spiritual advisor, the Jesuit priest Father Stanislas Loiseau, to whom she showed a copy of her proposal. (The document that remains at the Archives has Father Loiseau's handwritten observations in its margins. Presumably, she wrote a second version before submitting it to the bishop.) For example, she proposed very flexible rules so as to allow the community to better adapt to the personalities and aspirations of its recruits. But Father Loiseau crossed out the term "*souplesse*" and replaced it with the term "*large*" or broad. In the margin he wrote: "No flexible rules. Rather, broadly defined rules which the Superiors will be able to disregard when needed."[50] Marie Gérin-Lajoie surely did not choose the term "*souplesse*" lightly. Her goal was to make religious life adapt to the modern world, and the word "*souplesse*" implied flexibility and adaptability. It is not surprising, then, that Father Loiseau would have paused on it and suggested, in its place, the word "*large*", which implied that the Church did not relinquish its authority over the rules. They would be fixed and they would not be challenged, but they would be sufficiently broad so as to allow the Superior to apply them at her own discretion. The end result is the same, but the symbolic implication of the Church's place in a modern society was the issue.

All these suggestions were made by Marie Gérin-Lajoie with a specific objective in mind: to attract all bourgeois women to her project. These included women who chose to enter religious life as well as those who chose marriage. In order to succeed, she needed to create a system that would allow the nuns to work with secular women on a daily basis and be involved in their organizations. Her strategy was to ease the community gently into secular society. For the first year or two, she suggested that her "group" (since it would not yet be formally recognized as a religious community) allow its recruits to continue living with their families.[51] The members could then wait for the "opportune moment" to

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[50] Ibid., 8: "Pas de règlement souple. Un règlement large dont les Supérieures pourront dispenser en cas de besoin."

[51] Ibid., 2.

leave their families and live a life of community. And those who chose to remain with their families could do so without fear of being excluded from the community.[52] This innovative aspect would be achieved by the creation of a third order, which would accept young women, married women, and women who wished to take part in the community's mission without necessarily taking the vows, "somewhat like the beguines."[53]

By referring to the Beguines, Marie Gérin-Lajoie showed that she was partly inspired by an institutional structure that had existed in Europe for centuries. The "béguinages" were institutions that grouped women who wished to belong to religious communities without having to take perpetual vows. They multiplied during the thirteenth century in the Netherlands and in Germany, but were most numerous in Belgium. The work of the Béguines consisted of praying, visiting the sick and making lace.[54]

Although Marie Gérin-Lajoie was open to the idea that her recruits not be forced to take the vows, she nevertheless insisted on the need for her "social apostles" to master both spiritual knowledge and technical knowledge. This proposal was considered quite radical, since she was essentially putting spirituality and secular work on an equal footing. She suggested changing the nature of the novitiate; more specifically, she proposed that the novitiate no longer be a probationary period spent in isolation and dedicated exclusively to spiritual training. Her recruits would benefit from spiritual training, of course--she did not intend to exclude it, in fact, she insisted that it be "extremely solid"[55]--but she also wanted them to benefit from technical training and practical experience. She wanted the novitiate to make room for:

> a general experience of life and of good works: family life and its various characteristics, through visits in the homes of both rich and poor; human miseries; care of the sick, various types of relief to the indigent; study trips

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[52] Ibid., 3.
[53] Ibid., 4: "un peu à la façon des béguines."
[54] Larousse encyclopédique en couleurs, Tome 3, (Paris 1977), 959-960.
[55] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "Projet de fondation," 4.

when possible and useful. After this general training will come specialization...[56]

Father Loiseau called attention to this paragraph in her text and wrote in the margin: "I think the novitiate should be almost exclusively dedicated to a solid religious training. After the novitiate there will be room for study."[57]

Father Loiseau's written remarks throughout this document could have been a forewarning of the difficulty that such a project would have of being accepted. In fact, seven years would pass between the moment when Marie Gérin-Lajoie submitted her proposal to Mgr Bruchési and the moment when the Church finally gave her authorization to found her congregation. It was a period she described in her memoirs as "the long wait."[58]

Towards the founding of the *Institut Notre-Dame du Bon Conseil*

During these years, Marie Gérin-Lajoie became impatient with the Church's delay in responding to her proposal. Although she did not explain in her memoirs what caused this delay, she wondered whether her religious community would ever see the light of day.[59] She therefore attempted to pursue her project as a secular group. She united the few followers she had at that point, and, together as roommates in a rented house, they practised a life of community without having taken any vows. They began putting in place the infrastructure needed to educate bourgeois women and to respond to the needs of working class women.

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[56] Ibid.: "une expérience générale de la vie et des oeuvres: vie de famille et ses divers caractères par les visites aux foyers pauvres et riches; misères humaines; soin des malades, secours de toutes sortes aux indigents; voyages d'étude quand il sera possible et utile. Ensuite de cette formation générale viendrait la spécialisation..."

[57] Ibid.: "Je pense que le noviciat devrait être exclusivement ou presque consacré à une solide formation religieuse. Après le noviciat, les études."

[58] In "Gerbes de Souvenirs," Marie Gérin-Lajoie refers to the period between the submission of her proposal to the Church and the Church's response as "la longue attente".

[59] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "Gerbes de Souvenirs," 11.

In France, a similar system, known as *maisons sociales*, had known some success. The *maisons sociales*, or "social houses", were attempts made by French bourgeois women at professionalizing social work. Women such as Mercédès Le Fer de la Motte, Marie-Jeanne Bassot, Mathilde Girault, to name a few, wanted to respond to the problems of the new urban environment by establishing "houses" in the heart of urban neighborhoods. Their objective, much like that pursued by Marie Gérin-Lajoie, was to go beyond distributing hand-outs to the poor. Historian Sylvie Fayet-Scribe explains that they wanted to train bourgeois women at being social workers: "They distinguished themselves from the traditional practice of charity by their concern for personal, professional training and by their desire to transmit this knowledge to others, [...] they wished to open schools to teach "social work" to others."[60]

Although she never wrote of her knowledge of the *maisons sociales*, one of these institutions, the *Union familiale*, was on her itinerary when she visited France. As well, her itinerary included the name of Maurice Beaufreton, director of the *Union familiale*'s newsletter. No explicit appreciation of the *Union familiale* and of the *maisons sociales* in general by Marie Gérin-Lajoie has been found: she did not write any notes or articles on them. However, given the resemblances between the French movement and her own undertakings, it seems that she had been influenced by French experience. For example, the profile of the women associated with the French movement was strikingly similar to that of the women Marie Gérin-Lajoie was aiming to recruit. In addition to believing in the importance of being intellectually competent (they spoke many languages, travelled throughout Europe and sat in on different university courses[61]), they also had a significant religious background. Sylvie Fayet-Scribe has noted in her study on female Social

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[60] Sylvie Fayet-Scribe, Associations féminines et catholicisme social: de la charité à l'action sociale, XIXe-XXe siècle (Paris 1990), 172: "Elles se démarquent de l'exercice de la charité traditionnelle par leur souci de formation personnelle professionelle, et par le désir de transmettre ce savoir à d'autres....elles désirent ouvrir des écoles pour apprendre le "travail social" à d'autres."

[61] Ibid., 173.

Catholicism that: "Madame Le Fer relied mostly upon a group comprised of former nuns (or of women having wished to become nuns)...as well as from assistants who dedicated a few hours a week to charitable organizations."[62]

The movement in France grew considerably at the turn of the century. The first house opened its doors in 1899, and was followed by two more in 1902 (Maison Sociale de Montrouge, Maison Sociale de Montmartre), another two in 1905 (one in the 13th arrondissement, another close to the Bastille) and in 1908, the Maison Levallois-Perret.[63] According to Fayet-Scribe, the success of these houses was attributable principally to the social profile of the leaders. She explains how the influential circle of friends that surrounded Marie-Jeanne Bassot, for example, helped make the *Résidence Levallois-Perret* a large and successful house, despite the fact that it started off as a small working-class accomodation.[64] Marie-Jeanne Bassot received sufficient donations from American social reformers, including the people associated with the American Women's Hospital, to buy half the shares of a realty company. This allowed her, with time, to buy a hectare of land and several buildings on which to build her *Résidence*.[65] Moreover, she had the support of bankers and businessmen. By 1921, donations and memberships represented 80% of the *Résidence*'s revenues, which made her largely independent of the French clergy.[66] As well, her ability to rely on Americans is testimony once again to the international nature of this movement not only in terms of intellectual contacts, but also of material support.

Although Marie Gérin-Lajoie's objectives in renting an urban house with her "followers" were similar to those of Marie-Jeanne Bassot and others, her experience was quite different, since she approached the project from a different perspective. In her case, the idea of setting up a "secular" house of social education and services was always meant

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[62] Ibid., 172: "Madame Le Fer va surtout s'appuyer sur un groupe composé d'anciennes religieuses (ou ayant désiré le devenir)...ainsi que sur des auxiliaires qui consacrent quelques heures par semaine aux oeuvres."

[63] Ibid., 173.

[64] Ibid., 174.

[65] Ibid., 177.

[66] Ibid.

to be a temporary measure while waiting for the Church's approval for the foundation of her community. In fact, in the years preceding her decision to rent a house in an urban neighborhood, she had already begun preparing her "followers"--those bourgeois women whom she described as "young, serious women who were dedicated to youth organizations"[67]--for community life. On two occasions, she convinced them to spend the summer months with her in the country, living as though they were part of a religious community. The first time, in the Laurentians in 1919, she noted, "the day was spent doing small chores, reading and taking walks. The rosary was recited together as well as prayer in the evenings."[68] The second trip, which took place in 1921 in a cottage in Saint-Zotique, was more decisive: "This time, our readings prepared us for religious life....when came time to go our own ways, in the fall, we waited only for the moment when we would reunite for good."[69]

Her decision to establish a house in the city was therefore part of the series of events related to her project of founding a religious community. And so, unlike Marie-Jeanne Bassot who worked independently of the French Church, Marie Gérin-Lajoie acted with the approval of the clergy. Her previous actions had ensured that by then, she would be absorbed into the Church's hierarchical structure even though her community did not yet exist. In her memoirs, she explained that her search for a suitable house began only after obtaining the permission of Mgr Gauthier, who agreed that the approval from Rome was slow in coming and that her work should begin in the meantime. Moreover, the nature of Mgr Gauthier's permission implied that her search for a suitable house should be undertaken within the network of urban parishes, thereby, again, drawing her into the ecclesiastical milieu.

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[67] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "Une Gerbe de Souvenirs," 3: "les jeunes filles sérieuses qui se dévouaient aux oeuvres de jeunesse".

[68] Ibid., 5: "la journée se passait à de petits travaux, à des lectures, à des promenades. Le chapelet se disait en commun et la prière le soir."

[69] Ibid., 9: "Nos lectures, cette fois, nous préparaient directement à la vie religieuse....Le moment venu de nous séparer, à l'automne, nous n'aspirions plus qu'au moment de nous grouper définitivement."

She was finally welcomed in the parish of St-Stanislas, where she rented a small house with her three friends. During the first few months, her day-to-day activities were strikingly similar to those of the *Maison Levallois-Perret*. In both cases, the women spent time working in order to earn a living--Marie-Jeanne Bassot and Mathilde Girault gave language courses and taught piano,[70] while Marie Gérin-Lajoie and her group gave classes and undertook bookbinding.[71] After these necessary chores, both groups dedicated themselves to the development of social work, by inviting young bourgeois girls to participate in study circles and by visiting families in poor neighborhoods. Marie Gérin-Lajoie sat on the committee of the *Fédération Nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste*, and helped this organization with the running of study circles as well as the establishment of new circles. They gave talks to groups of women workers during lunch breaks (at Dominion Rubber, for example), and they lent their books to the young women of the parish.[72]

However, despite the similarities in the objectives and daily activities pursued by both groups of women, the presence of the Church, or more specifically, of members of the clergy, in Marie Gérin-Lajoie's project was constant, contrary to the French *maisons sociales*, which functioned independently of the clergy.[73] For example, in her memoirs, Marie Gérin-Lajoie wrote that soon after her move, her parish priest immediately took the initiative of having the house painted.[74]

The approval from Rome came relatively quickly after the establishment of her group into the parish. (She had moved into the house in May of 1922, and received the approval in December of the same year). After receiving the approval, she immediately asked to begin the novitiate as a way of recruiting more young women to her cause. (By the time she obtained approval, her group included no more than three women.[75]) Mgr

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[70] Fayet-Scribe, Associations féminines, 174.
[71] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "Gerbes de Souvenir," 13.
[72] Ibid.
[73] Ibid., 128.
[74] Ibid., 12.
[75] Ibid., 15.

Gauthier agreed and accepted to preside over the ceremony, which would take place inside Marie Gérin-Lajoie's house, in the company of priests, sisters from the *Congrégation Notre-Dame* and the Grey Nuns, as well as friends and family.

In the proclamation read by Mgr Gauthier, the Church recognized the need for study circles, professional unions, and secretariats for social organizations, especially in a context where new forms of misery and suffering could diminish peoples' religious convictions and Christian lifestyle.[76] The Church's fear of seeing people become more and more indifferent to its message forcibly placed it in a position favorable to Marie Gérin-Lajoie since her ideas were aimed at increasing the influence of Christian principles in society, especially in the urban setting which was precisely the area where the Church felt most vulnerable. Moreover, she was not alone in undertaking Social Catholic activities in Québec; the Jesuits had established the *École sociale populaire* in Montréal and, in Québec City, Mgr Bégin and Mgr Roy spearheaded youth organizations. That Marie Gérin-Lajoie's project fit into this tradition must have no doubt contributed to the acceptance of her ideas by the clerical authorities.

The edict recognizing the establishment of the *Institut Notre-Dame du Bon Conseil* therefore acknowledged that the social organizations Marie Gérin-Lajoie wanted to support were indispensable, but that they lacked the trained personnel that could give them stability.[77] As such, the Church stated that the new *Institut Notre-Dame du Bon-Conseil* "proposes, in aspiring to the glory of God and the saving of souls, to educate and train those who wish to dedicate themselves to women's social organizations and to assure the moral direction of these same organizations."[78]

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[76] AINDBC, *Mandement d'érection de l'Institut Notre-Dame du Bon-Conseil*, reproduced in Marie Gérin-Lajoie's memoirs, "Gerbes de Souvenirs," 18. (translated)

[77] Ibid., 19.

[78] Ibid: "se propose, en vue de la gloire de Dieu et du bien des âmes, d'instruire et de former les personnes qui s'emploient aux oeuvres sociales féminines, et de prendre la direction morale de ces mêmes oeuvres."

Although Marie Gérin-Lajoie and her followers began the novitiate almost immediately, she was forced to abandon her desire to combine the novitiate with the technical training of women. This curtailment of her ideals even extended to her participation in her own organizations, including the *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste*, from which she had to resign.[79] This was not the only element of her initial proposal that she would have to abandon. Her desire to do away with strict rules (thereby allowing women to live with their families and giving women more liberty to organize their daily schedules) would also have to be sacrificed. In a propaganda article that she published in La Bonne Parole in 1925, she explained that "the sisters of the new Institut live in common with a strict schedule for work, prayer and rest."[80]

The Church was therefore too conservative for Marie Gérin-Lajoie's ambitions, and, to achieve even part of what she wanted, she was forced to abandon key aspects of her initial proposal, including experimenting with new ways of belonging to a religious community. Thus the price exacted by the Church for allowing her to go forward, was the elimination of the most original elements of her project. However, she did succeed in convincing it of the need to train bourgeois women at becoming social workers, "to accomplish the special duties that modern life imposes on them."[81] Her desire to restrict the sisters' role to that of *helping* secular women take control of social organizations was also realized, as she explained in La Bonne Parole: "Their role, that which apostolic authority had assigned to them, is not so much to undertake Social Catholic works themselves, but rather to help members of the bourgeoisie efficiently take control of these works..."[82]

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[79] Ibid., 29.

[80] AINDBC, Marie Gérin-Lajoie, "L'institut des Soeurs de N.-D. du Bon-Conseil," La Bonne Parole, Vol XIII, No 9. September 1925, .6: "Les soeurs du nouvel Institut vivent d'une vie commune, ayant des heures réglées pour le travail, la prière et le repos."

[81] Ibid: "pour accomplir les devoirs spéciaux que leur imposent la vie moderne."

[82] Ibid: "Leur rôle, celui que l'autorité apostolique a daigné leur assigner, c'est moins de faire par elles-mêmes des oeuvres sociales catholiques, que d'aider les personnes du monde à se bien acquitter de ces oeuvres..."

The *Institut* initially offered this training through study circles, Church groups (*patronage*) and retreats.[83] Eventually, Marie Gérin-Lajoie was able to found a school whose sole purpose was to train women at becoming social workers. In 1931, with the help of the *Congrégation Notre-Dame*, she opened the *École d'Action Sociale*.[84] It is in this context that she succeeded in combining spiritual, theoretical and practical training for her students. The programme covered religion and social morality, political economy, social legislation, social history, psychology, law, and the responsibilities of the social worker. The practical aspect included visits and working experience in certain organizations. Among the professors were Jesuit priests from the *École sociale populaire*, sociologists, such as Esdras Minville, and the fervent nationalist, Edouard Montpetit, who fought for the involvement of French Canadians in the industrial economy. The fundamental goal of the *École d'Action Sociale* was to produce a female Christian elite in touch with "modern social problems" and, therefore, capable of contributing to the restoration of a moral social order.[85] Soon after its establishment, it became affiliated with the *École des sciences sociales* of the University of Montreal. After its first ten years of existence, almost one-hundred nuns and secular women obtained University diplomas.[86]

A few years after the foundation of the *École d'Action Sociale*, Marie Gérin-Lajoie founded a second school: in 1936, the *École d'éducation familiale et sociale*, managed by nuns with the collaboration of secular women, opened its doors. Contrary to the *École d'Action Sociale*, its programme was not restricted to nuns and bourgeois women. In addition to training social workers, it also catered to working class women, offering courses designed to help them cope with poverty by teaching them nutrition, sewing,

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[83] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, "L'institut des Soeurs de N.-D. du Bon-Conseil", 6.

[84] According to the Archivist at the AINDBC, Sister Marcienne Proulx, the *Institut*, during these early years, had no room to accommodate all the students, which is why Marie Gérin-Lajoie turned to the *Congrégation Notre-Dame*. Interview by the author, June 1996.

[85] AINDBC, "Prospectus de l'École d'Action Sociale," 1943-44, 2.

[86] Ibid.

hygiene and budgeting.[87] The idea of extending its teaching "in particular, among the popular classes" was to spread, as always, the principles of Christian morality.[88]

These two schools, and the *Institut Notre-Dame du Bon-Conseil* as a whole, are an embodiment of the pluralism of the Québec Church. Marie Gérin-Lajoie was part of an interpretive community that included a number of currents in Québec's Catholicism, such as the social vision of the Montréal Jesuits, the feminist vision of the Catholic women associated with the *Fédération nationale Saint-Jean Baptiste*, and the conservative vision of the Catholic hierarchy. The fact that these different currents existed and were able to function together within the Québec Church speaks to its acceptance of diversity. If Marie Gérin-Lajoie's project was conceived from the first moment as belonging to the Church, clerical authorities were nevertheless unwilling to accept its more radical components. This is testimony to the dominance, between the two World Wars, of the Québec Church's conservative strand over its more innovative currents.

Faced with frustrating delays in the establishment of her congregation, Marie Gérin-Lajoie turned to the French movement's experience with the *maisons sociales* as a way to move ahead. Rather than allow her project to languish because of the hierarchy's conservatism, she was willing to abandon elements that had to be dear to her. Her determination, as well as her flexibility and skill, are evident in her resolve to work within these limits. The fact that she believed that more radical initiatives than the Church hierarchy would allow were needed to reaffirm Catholicism's central role in society in the face of powerful secularizing trends shows the clear-sightedness of her analysis of religion's predicament in the twentieth century.

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[87] AINDBC, "L'École d'éducation familiale et sociale, Programme des études," 1936.

[88] AINDBC, Pamphlet titled "L'École d'éducation familiale et sociale" (externat et internat), sous la direction des Soeurs de N.-D. du Bon-Conseil, avec la collaboration d'auxiliaires laïques, undated: "en particulier dans les classes populaires."

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Conclusion

In 1950, Marie Gérin-Lajoie wrote a memoir to the *Université de Montréal* in which she summed up the achievements of her *École d'éducation familiale et sociale*. In it, she noted that her school, soon after its foundation, became annexed to the *Université*, and more specifically, to its *École des sciences sociales*, an institution that was itself founded by members of the clerical hierarchy and prominent lay Social Catholics[1] in an attempt to re-establish Catholic principles in a society where the Church's influence seemed to be decreasing.[2] That Marie Gérin-Lajoie would have agreed to annex her school to this larger institution seems natural given their similar objectives: restoring the Christian social order in modern society. By working with the *Université de Montréal*, she most probably expected to increase the influence of Social Catholicism in Québec. However, by doing so, she also allowed her project to be taken over by the Catholic hierarchy and by the *Université*, an institution that would eventually succumb to the forces of secularization, and lead her own project to its downfall.

Just as Marie Gérin-Lajoie had attempted to make room for spirituality in the modern world by adapting herself to it, the founders of the *Université de Montréal* also followed the same path. The administration of the *Université* was comprised of members of the clergy, including Mgr Bruchési and Mgr Gauthier, as well as lay Catholics.[3] And its *École des sciences sociales* was meant to be an extension of the *Semaine sociale du Canada*, with its Social Catholic orientation.[4] In her memoir, Marie Gérin-Lajoie explained

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[1] Most notably, Edouard Montpetit, recognized for having contributed to the establishment of the "modern" university in French Québec. Inspired by the social doctrine of the Church--he often quoted the papal encyclical *Rerum Novarum*--as well as tenets of liberalism, Edouard Montpetit participated in the foundation of the *Université de Montréal*'s *École des Hautes Études Commerciales*, contributed to the development of the *École polytechnique* and became director and founder of the *École des sciences sociales*. See Marcel Fournier, L'entrée dans la modernité. Science, culture et société au Québec (Montréal 1986), 47-50.

[2] Fournier, 58.

[3] Ibid., 49.

[4] Ibid., 57.

that her school, which attracted the *Université*'s interest because of the "practical elements of the programme," became annexed to the *École des sciences sociales* in 1937, after only one year of existence, as a result of Mgr Gauthier's efforts.[5] That Marie Gérin-Lajoie was a devoted Catholic and that it was her bishop who encouraged the annexation of the two schools can help explain why she would have accepted this. In fact, when the *Université* opened its own school of Professional Social Service in 1939, she went so far as to abandon the control of her project even further when she decided to discontinue the practical social training she had been offering to her students so as not to "cast a shadow on the University's new school."[6]

Although she presumably expected that the annexation of her school to a larger and more powerful institution would benefit the establishment of a Christian social order in Québec society, the *Université de Montréal* did not attain the status it had hoped for and consequently contributed to the failure of the Social Catholic project as a whole. The founders had wanted this "modern" University to fill the void that existed in terms of post-secondary education in French Québec, but in a way that would conform to Catholic principles.[7] Not only was its Charter based on a Catholic philosophy, but the presence of members of the clergy in important administrative positions illustrates the spirit that the founders wanted to give the new University. However, this large dependence on a Church whose influence was slowly diminishing at the beginning of the century would hinder the University's development. Its struggle to survive until the 1960s, when the government finally took over its funding, is evidence of the Church's weakening position in a society where social development was taking an increasingly secular turn.

Ironically, not only was Marie Gérin-Lajoie's vision of a Catholic social order pitted against such great odds, but her project actually contributed to the development of secularization in Québec society by providing the *Université de Montréal*'s *École des*

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[5] AINDBC, Mère Marie Gérin-Lajoie, Mémoire sur l'École d'éducation familiale et sociale. 1950, 1: "..à cause de l'objectif social pratique de son programme."
[6] Ibid., 7: "...afin d'éviter de porter ombrage à la nouvelle École."
[7] Fournier, 49.

sciences sociales with numerous recruits. In her memoir, she explained that during the course of the 14 years that followed the founding of her school, the number of women registered in her classes never stopped increasing. By 1950, a total of 1000 women had followed the full-time programme and 12 000 women had taken the part-time route.[8] The *Université de Montréal* surely felt the impact of this success as her students became its own. The educational programme that Marie Gérin-Lajoie spearheaded therefore contributed to helping the *Université* survive during its years of financial difficulties. Sociologist Marcel Fournier explains that the *École des sciences sociales* , in order to assure its funding, was forced to cater to the demands of a number of groups, including women's groups. For example, the school offered courses in social hygiene to nurses and nuns as well as courses in political economy and in commercial law to the members of the *Association des femmes d'affaires*.[9] According to the numbers in Marie Gérin-Lajoie's memoir, her *École d'éducation familiale et sociale* would have provided the *Université* with a total of 13 000 full-time and part-time students over the course of fourteen years, a significant contribution. It is clear then, given the interest demonstrated by lay women for the school, that Marie Gérin-Lajoie contributed to the "relèvement féminin" by not only providing them with a form of higher education, but by facilitating their entry into the university.

In this sense, her feminist objectives did meet with some success. Moreover, the work she did on the feminist front allows today's scholars of women's history in Québec to add another dimension to their definition of feminism at the turn of the century. A good amount of research has been done on the role that religious orders played in the development of feminism in Québec. Many historians have argued that the convent, by providing women with an alternative to motherhood, allowed them to explore careers that otherwise would not have been available to them, and allowed them to assert themselves. As such, French Québec feminism flourished first inside religious orders.

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[8] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, Mémoire, 2.
[9] Fournier, 60.

Marie Gérin-Lajoie's story testifies that this was indeed the case, but her experience goes even further by showing that women's conception of feminism in the 1910s and 1920s could also include a larger role for secular women in Québec society. In other words, Marie Gérin-Lajoie tried to expand, beyond the walls of the convents, the area where feminism could develop, or where the "relèvement féminin" could take place. By breaking away from middle-class feminist circles to fulfill her yearning for a religious vocation, she created a new way for feminism to develop. Her *Institut* allowed nuns to help secular women improve their lives. In other words, she built a bridge between religious and secular women, uniting them by breaking down the "thick wall" she spoke of. She envisioned opportunities for secular women in the public sphere and worked, her entire life, at preparing women to appropriate their just place in society by developing for them an appropriate education. The thousands of women who attended university as a result of the programmes she put in place at her *École d'éducation familiale et sociale*, is testimony to her success.

Ironically then, Marie Gérin-Lajoie's success in terms of her feminist objectives helped assure the development and survival of a University that would eventually eliminate the religious spirit of its educational programme and transform itself into a secular institution. Her 1950 memoir to the *Université* suggests that she had resigned herself to the fact that a religious order was not meant to train professionals in modern society, and that her school would be limited to serving the needs of the Church. She stated, in the conclusion of her brief, that, in her understanding, her school would contribute to the field of professional social service by training women "for the benefit of parishes' good works,"[10] and in so doing, promote an "intelligent cooperation between the religious and secular elements that comprise the French Canadian area of social services."[11]

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[10] AINDBC, Gérin-Lajoie, Mémoire, 8: "...pour le bénéfice des oeuvres paroissiales..."
[11] Ibid., 8: "une intelligente coopération entre les éléments religieux et laïques qui s'occupent de bienfaisance dans le milieu canadien-français."

The evolution of her thinking on this score is striking. In the 1910s and 1920s, she could still believe that the secularizing trends in Québec society could be reversed through energetic action by Social Catholics. By the 1950s, that hope had severely weakened. With forty more years of hindsight, we can see that while it may have been reasonable on her part to envisage an uphill struggle towards a Christian social order, her battle was lost before it had begun. In wanting to develop her project within a religious framework, she chose a path that social development would not allow. Québec was already a secularized society, post-secondary institutions were in full growth, the professionalization of social work was well underway and the decrease of the Church's influence was not to be reversed, as the situation of the Church in France testified.

In Marie Gérin-Lajoie's time then, Québec's social structure was already modern, contrary to what traditionalist historians maintain even today. Granted, the complete separation of Church and State, considered the cornerstone of modern liberal societies, was not yet complete. Political reasons allowed the Catholic Church to maintain an important presence in areas that would have otherwise been public such as education, health and social services. And by focusing so intensely on these sectors, Marie Gérin-Lajoie might have had the impression that Québec was less modern than it really was, therefore nourishing the hope that she could reverse the forces of secularization. That her project of establishing a Catholic social order would, in the end, contribute to the process of secularization lends weight, in a paradoxical way, to the revisionist school that maintains that Québec in the 1910s and 1920s was indeed a modern society.

To the historian today, Marie Gérin-Lajoie therefore represents a site where the complexities of the modern condition can be explored, and her intellectual journey must be understood as an expression of these complexities. She was at once attracted to and repulsed by the changes brought on by modernity. On the one hand, it provided opportunities for change, and, as a feminist, she was attracted to the possibilities made available to women. On the other hand, as a fervent Social Catholic, she resisted the

fundamental notion of modernity: the idea that spirituality should be removed from public life and restricted to the private affairs of individuals. In her attempt to reconcile her fears and aspirations, she chose not to reject modernity, but to try to modify it in such a way that society would maintain a spiritual fabric and still benefit from certain changes that the modern condition allowed, such as a larger role for women in the public realm.

Her attitude towards modernity, that is her contention that it could exist without separating the political and the spiritual, provides interesting material for the social scientist who wishes to explore more closely the complexity of modernity. Even though modernity has been, throughout the twentieth century, the dominant cultural model of industrialized societies, the fact that Marie Gérin-Lajoie and Social Catholics in general actively rejected its secularist project indicates that modernity, however dominant, is not without some resistance. And even though Social Catholics and Marie Gérin-Lajoie failed in establishing an alternative social order to secularization, the very presence of this struggle within modernity is in itself interesting. Marie Gérin-Lajoie's struggle to find a place for spirituality in the public realm is one form, among many, of resistance to modernity's cultural project. In fact, the rejection of secularism is still apparent today in States such as Iran or Saudi Arabia, which continue to link both the political and the spiritual. Her story then, is important to the study of history because it brings into question the seeming inevitability of secularism as a cultural project.

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Marie Gérin-Lajoie, 29 years old.
First attempt at living a life of community
at Achigan Lake, in the summer of 1919.

Marie Gérin-Lajoie, 32 years old.
One year prior to the foundation of the
Institut Notre-Dame du Bon-Conseil, 1922.

Marie Gérin-Lajoie, 37 years old.
Perpetual Vows, May 7 1927.